

A DELL BOOK

DELL

351

Tropic Seas, Moonlight, Two Girls...

ERROL FLYNN

# Showdown





# SHOWDOWN

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## Persons this *Story* is about—

**SHAMUS O'THAMES,**  
a tall, shy Irishman, is a very conventional young man whose fate it is to lead a most unconventional existence. He is seeking his fortune in the barbarous South Sea Islands, with a plan of life which includes no women.

**CLEO,**  
a vivacious, strikingly beautiful actress who is oddly at home in the wilderness, shows herself familiar with the ways of gracious living, yet her spirit is as untamed as that of a South Sea savage. Ill-mannered, arrogant, wilful, Cleo is well-versed in playing a fast-and-loose game with a man's emotions.

**GANICE,**  
an entrancingly lovely young nun who lives in a mission in a remote outpost of civilization, has a gentle smile and beautiful gray eyes which betray her fear that Shamus and her own emotions may make her break her vows.

**MR. SWARTZ (DOC),**  
Cleo's employer, is a rich American who exudes friendship. He has a yen to photograph head hunters in the South Sea Islands—for which purpose he charts Shamus's boat.

**JODO WILKINS,**  
who plays the part of Cleo's kid brother in the picture Swartz is making, is a pale, skinny youth with thick-lensed spectacles and a venomous disposition.

**WHITEY O'DONNEL,**  
Swartz's cameraman, a 'hypochondriac with a constant worried expression, has teeth that look like a half-finished game of dominoes and white hair sprouting from his head and knees.

**JIMMY,**  
Swartz's second cameraman, has a shock of close-cropped red hair that stands up like a brush. He has a glass eye which he often and casually removes to polish.

**FATHER KIRSHNER,**  
is a big, wise, jolly missionary by nature possessed of a fierce and restless energy which 19 years in the steaming New Guinea jungles has done little to assuage.

**ANITOK,**  
an ugly little tyrant with a twisted mind, is the ruler of a tribe of Pygmy head hunters who are terrorizing the region. His bitter hatred for white men dates back to the time a white woman laughed at him humiliatingly.

**KANAKA TOM,**  
Anitok's number one man and a friend of Father Kirshner, has a nude woman tattooed on his huge chest. Tom has deep and furtive plans for the future with which no friendship is to interfere.



## SHOWDOWN

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### What this *Story* is about—

With this sensationally frank novel, an actor turned author brings something new to the art of fiction writing, which will thrill and satisfy.

Mr. Flynn's many fans have admired the insight and skill of his interpretations on the screen. Readers will admire even more the understanding and uncompromising honesty he brings to the unconventional situations in this exciting story.

The story tells of handsome, taciturn Shamus O'Thames, whose heart is filled with the vision of the beautiful, cloistered Ganice, forever unattainable because of her vows, whom Shamus met before he skips the tramp ship *Maski* carrying a cargo of Hollywood actors to location.

On the *Maski* is the seductive, glamorous actress Cleo. Bored by the men she has known, Cleo is intrigued by the forbidding Irishman. She senses that he is more disturbed and excited by her than he cares to admit.

To the accompaniment of tempest and shipwreck, of danger and battle with the elements, this story of elemental love rises to a furious climax. To the half-civilized Kanaka boatmen, the Gods themselves seem to frown on the dangerous games played by Shamus and Cleo. A hurricane sweeps over the groaning sides of the *Maski*, and fighting for his own and Cleo's life in the mountainous seas, Shamus realizes with sudden agony what her death would mean to him. When, next day, they find themselves with a handful of battered survivors on a strip of savage New Guinea coast, Shamus is forced to make his decision.

The beautiful and compelling love passages of *Showdown* are matched by the grandeur of its sea passages. Mr. Flynn knows and loves the sea, and has made it part of the very fabric of this story of a man and a woman pitted against nature and their own passions.



A STORY OF TEMPEST, SHIPWRECK, AND LOVE

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# SHOWDOWN

By ERROL FLYNN

Author of  
"Beam Ends"

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# Showdown

## *Chapter One: A JUMPING MAN*

"Two white leopards, in the heat of the day, Under the shade of a kapiac lay. . . ." Father Kirshner, stretched out miserably in the stern of the canoe, wondered idly where he had heard those lines. Read them somewhere, no doubt, probably in one of the frayed used books which were collected by boxfuls in Sydney for distribution to missions like his own. At any rate the picture which they conjured up was a pleasant and cooling one, and a comfort to a man in his uncomfortable position, even though the imagination bogged down at the improbable conception of two white leopards. If it had been one, now—

He slapped suddenly at a mosquito. The persistent brute must have been following him for the last ten miles. Mosquitoes, he thought, with mild indignation, had no business this far out from the coast—even the New Guinea coast—at any time, let alone in broad daylight. He shifted his position slightly and rearranged the skirts of his cassock to keep the hot sun off his bare legs, and pulled the wide-brimmed missionary's tope a little farther down over his face.

His gestures were deliberately slow, for he knew that if he moved too rapidly the sweat would start running down his face again and into his beard, causing the skin to itch uncomfortably. Economy of movement called for an unusual amount of self-discipline on the part of Father Kirshner, for by nature he was possessed of a fierce and restless energy which nineteen years in the steaming jungles of New Guinea had done little to assuage.

Ah! The big gray mosquito, he noticed, had now lit on the back of Vetoma, the nearest of the three Kanaka boys, the one to whom he had a few minutes ago surrendered his paddle. *The fat brute*, he thought indignantly, *the gourmet!* Having gorged himself on white meat he was now going to change his diet, heedless of Vetoma's working back muscles, and the beads of sweat which stood out like glistening individual jewels on the



taut, chocolate brown skin.

Momentarily reviewing the courses opening to him, seeking the one which required the least outlay of energy, Father Kirshner slowly raised his bare foot, bending his knee until it almost buried itself in his beard. Then he straightened his leg suddenly, his foot jabbing viciously. The mosquito flew off unharmed, and Vetoma, suddenly shoved face forward, missed a stroke and looked around inquiringly. Father Kirshner, feeling somewhat foolish but deciding that an explanation wasn't worth the trouble, smiled and gave him a genial nod. Vetoma nodded back and resumed his paddling, puzzled. *The Father is getting frolicsome*, he thought; *the sun, perhaps*.

"Vetoma, pass me my medicine bag," said Father Kirshner, adding in a louder tone, "*bitte*." It always annoyed him that neither in the Buna nor Sananandra vocabularies did any word exist for "please" or "thank you," little nuances of language the importance of which he had never been able to impress upon the uncomprehending natives. As well try to explain to a German peasant, he often thought hopelessly, the original inspiration for the Japanese custom of sucking air in through the teeth when talking. Not many knew that it was to avoid blowing possibly foul breath into the face of the one being addressed. Like the little Japanese captain of that pearling lugger he had come upon along the coast yesterday, hissing and bobbing up and down politely with every second word. He approved of that—the importance of courtesy, even in the outward motions, should be regarded as a vital consideration in a world more than ever prone to disregard such things.

Opening the small leather bag loosely described as his medicine kit, Father Kirshner carefully extracted one of the several fine red apples nestling regally on a bed of cotton lint on top of the other contents. He turned it over and examined its surface carefully. No sign of decay, he noted with satisfaction, not a blemish anywhere, and was instantly assailed by an overpowering impulse to bite through its luscious hide, let his teeth ravish its juicy depths, and devour it. With difficulty suppressing the temptation, he put the fruit back on its lint bed and sighed. Up until yesterday when the Japanese pearling captain had extracted them from his icebox and given them to him, Father Kirshner

had not seen an apple for years. Tropical fruits, of course, were plentiful, but those of temperate climes never reached New Guinea. These apples were earmarked for Sister Alicia, the little old nun from Alsace who shared his passion for such unobtainable luxuries but had little time left on this earth to enjoy them.

He dug further into his bag through a maze of surgical instruments and vials until his fingers touched the loaded chamber of his .45. Father Kirshner's life was consecrated to the principle of peace on earth and goodwill toward mankind, but the principle did not include letting the oil dry out on his gun barrel. He shifted the gun to a position which would make it more quickly available if needed, and burrowed on. Next he came to a small harmonica, and removing it, laid it on his lap abstractedly. Heaven only knew when they might be able to start home again, if their search continued to be as fruitless as it had been up to now, and a tune or two after a bit would vary the monotony. Besides, perhaps it would make Vetoma stop humming that island melody with such monotonous insistence.

Then he began untangling his binoculars from his stethoscope. The stretch of coast they were now passing held particular interest for him, for it was on this very spot that he had originally planted the cross, literally speaking, and built the first tiny mission on the dark New Guinea mainland. That was long ago, and it had turned out to be an unfortunate location to choose, for not only was the place a fever hole and the soil poor, but it was exposed to the full force of the trade winds, so that even coconut trees did badly. When the Gulabari wind struck, tearing up trees and buildings and demolishing overnight the work of five years of constant toil and hardship, Father Kirshner, bowing to the cyclone as an injunction from Heaven, began building a new mission and trade store many miles down the coast. Here the enterprise flourished from the very start, thus confirming his faith, not only in God's wisdom, but also in his business sense.

With difficulty twisting his huge body, which was much too large to fit the width of the canoe comfortably, into a more favorable position, he trained his glasses on the shore, carefully examining it almost yard by yard, from the shifting water line to the point at which vegetation formed an opaque curtain. Time was when, from half a mile at sea, he could have spotted the eyes of

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a wild pig peering out from the dense recesses of fern and lycopodium, or a turtle making its slow powerful way along the beach; could see with the sureness of a bushman the slightly parted underbrush which marked the recent passage of a human being, or note the slightest movement of the long slender furred tail of a tree kangaroo among the branches of a pandanus tree. For in his earlier years, matching his wits against the nature lore of the natives, he had learned to read coastline and forest as though they were the pages of a book. Now such details seemed to merge maddeningly into the whole, and he could only pretend that he was seeing as well as he ever had. Whether there was any sign there of what he was seeking, he could not tell. He only knew that he saw none.

Still he could pick out familiar features of the terrain he once had known so well, though this was not easy, for the jungle had long since reclaimed the clearings, and the location was recognizable only because of a general overall of topographical pattern which remained essentially the same: the peaks of the mountains in the background, which never changed their relations to one another—a man could take bearings on them once he learned to know them—and certain individual huge palms which had once been dear familiars to him.

But today he was not out to play a nostalgic game with his memory, nor to reclaim in his mind a strip of coast he had once brashly considered his own. A sacrilege that claim was, anyway. The earth was the Lord's and the fullness thereof. A strip of beach, the tree-carpeted slope of a mountain, bore no man's name. Yet the Lord's business was Father Kirshner's business—which he saw to with as great efficiency as his restricted modes of transportation permitted. And an insatiable curiosity about the ways of all men—and, for that matter, all nature—made his business never unpleasant.

How far would that monstrous little curiosity Anitok dare to come on his raiding and scouting expeditions, he wondered. The friendly Kanaka's report, brought to Father Kirshner the day before, said that this time five and many of Anitok's little men had come as far as the old mission site. The Kanaka also reported for the second time the strange white man's schooner, but apparently manned this time by a single Kanaka, whereas it took at least



eight men to handle her comfortably and safely. The Taubada and his crew, which had been reported on an earlier occasion, were strangely missing.

It was that report which had sent Father Kirshner scurrying uncomfortably down the Guinea coast in his canoe. It was not that he was worried about Anitok. So long as Kanaka Tom was the little tyrant's number one man, Father Kirshner felt that both he and his mission were reasonably safe. And, if Kanaka Tom ever became a traitor to friendship, there were always the well-oiled gun, the strength of Father Kirshner's brawny arm behind an ax when the ammunition ran out, and the sustaining hand of God in the end.

No, it was not fear which had sent him on this expedition, but a mixture of human compassion and human curiosity. He had a natural interest in Anitok's movements, for it was within the scheme of the Lord's business that Father Kirshner and his followers would one day Christianize this whole coast. But it was more than this which made him seek the facts of a story about a white man's schooner from which the white man and all but one of his crew were missing at a time when Anitok was on the loose. The two stories made a combination unpleasant to contemplate. It was the belief that he had sighted the schooner which had sent his canoe far out to sea the afternoon before when he had seen the ship which turned out disappointingly to be the Japanese pearler. It was to find a clue to the whole business that his eyes now swept the shore.

Perhaps if the past were not tugging at him so hard, he would be able to see the present more clearly. About where those young coconut trees were growing, he judged, would be the little cemetery containing the remains of Brother Ernest, who had sailed with him twenty years ago, on a small barquentine from Hamburg, and died in great pain almost immediately from some unidentified tropical disease. After that, he recalled, he had not seen another white man for several years, although actually his days had been too much absorbed to notice the terrible loneliness, occupied as he was with building and cultivating, busy making friends with the mountain tribes by day, and at night frustrating their incessant attempts to murder him.

Then had come 1914 and the World War, followed by the

expulsion and expropriation of the Germans from New Guinea, a fate only narrowly averted by himself and other missionaries. And ever since the constant fight to carry the word of God to unreceptive primitives who seemed to prefer the word bequeathed by cannibalistic forefathers.

The long and hard struggle had, of course, been worth-while, although a bit disappointing from the point of view of achievement. One man cannot bring about miracles in a mere short lifetime, no matter how energetically he works. And now, Father Kirshner suddenly thought angrily, more precious time might be lost if the British yielded to the bellowings of this agitator Hitler who was shouting for the return to Germany of her colonies. However, he consoled himself immediately, there was not much cause for concern. Unless a remarkable change had come over the English, the upstart wouldn't get far. History was hardly replete with instances of the British lion, once having clamped his jaws shut, magnanimously opening them to let a morsel drop.

Other disturbing omens, stories of religious repressions directed at Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, stories of vast military preparations, the recent successful conspiracies against the Reichstag Democratic government, had been reaching even his far-distant outpost for some time. He didn't know how much of it to believe, but he was thankful as never before for having renounced his Junker heritage to find his true part in life's pattern.

Idly he let his mind wander back to the days of his youth—the pomp and circumstance of the young Wilhelm's court, an officer in an aristocratic Uhlan regiment, true to type, haughty, arrogant, privileged to anger quicker than the lowly civilian, gay in the Prussian manner acquired from the French. Then one day the sudden blinding sense of futility, the conviction that there must be a meaning to existence beyond narrow self-interest. Dissatisfaction with his own Junker class, whose theme of life embraced only material things and a philosophy of force, had at last wrought in him a personal revolution. Christ's lesson may have been lost on the world, but there still remained time to strike a personal blow, be it ever so puny.

He smiled again as he recalled the consternation caused in his regiment, already on the eve of the World War, when he made known his decision. A missionary! Serious doubts arose as to his

sanity, particularly in his family circle, when with one grandiose gesture he gave his estate, lock, stock, and barrel, as the saying goes, to the Church. With all connections severed he promptly set sail for the South Seas.

He had much for which to thank a kindly destiny, he thought happily. Not even the Church had been able to wrest more than a few potatoes from that barren Prussian soil anyway, so it was little enough to eschew. Never once had he regretted his decision.

He raised his binoculars again and blew on the lenses, wiping them with the edge of his cassock. Strange, he thought, the behavior of the little Japanese pearler yesterday when he had seen the glasses. "Ah, Zeiss!" the fellow had broken out suddenly, and continued in perfect German, drawing his breath in sharply between his teeth: "I have a pair of the same make—the finest of all." Then he had produced glasses fully a foot long, of a modern type unfamiliar to Father Kirshner. It had struck him as most remarkable, not only that the man could speak German so flawlessly, but that a mere pearl fisherman should possess such an expensive piece of equipment. A strange, unfathomable, race, he reflected, and even more adventuresome than the Chinese; quite a number of Japanese luggers had been coming down lately from the Marshall and Caroline Islands to the north, formerly German territory.

Suddenly Vetoma, who had monotonously been humming his native tune all this time, broke off, and stopped paddling. "A man," he remarked, in a matter-of-fact voice, "jumps along the beach."

He pointed ahead, and Father Kirshner raised the glasses to his eyes.

"A fire is also there," Vetoma added softly.

Father Kirshner twisted the focusing screw impatiently. Vetoma hasn't spoiled his eyes with reading—that's why they're so good, he thought enviously. He wouldn't admit, even to himself, that age had anything to do with it. Even through the glasses he could barely distinguish the thin column of smoke rising straight toward the sky. Then he made out the figure, moving along the beach. Something about the man's movements, if it was a man, struck him as odd, although it was impossible for him to tell much at this distance. He lowered his glasses, gave the lenses



another quick swipe on the hem of his cassock, and looked again.

"*Himmell!*" he exclaimed involuntarily, and even as he strained his eyes he saw the figure make a couple of erratic circles and come to a stop. Suddenly it collapsed in the sand and lay still.

"Taubada," observed Vetoma, in the same mild tone, which is to say, "white man."

Father Kirshner heaved his great body upright so suddenly that the canoe threatened to capsize.

"To the shore!" he bellowed, as the harmonica and medicine bag clattered to the bottom of the boat. Seizing Vetoma's paddle, he began digging ferociously into the water.

What a people these Kanakas were, he thought with exasperation; one would suppose that white men—any men—staggered along this deserted beach with the regularity of breaking waves.

### *Chapter Two: A WHITE WOMAN LAUGHING*

For the ashen-colored skeleton lying on the bed in Father Kirshner's mission—a shadow of what might once have been a powerful young man—certain brain-fogged shadows began assuming a sort of hazy substance. Between bouts of delirium the man became dimly aware first of an enormous black beard, and then a face somehow shrouded in it. Piercing, coal black eyes, which had the amazing ability to combine in one look both a vital sparkling gayety and a compassionate and wise gravity, stabbed out from this mighty visage and became a probing challenge to his weakly flickering vitality.

As the dark shadows took on more reality, these impelling black eyes seemed often to dance with an almost mockingly comical light, as if to say, *What a joke that you should have thought you were going to die!* But at first the sick young man was far too weak to pay much attention, and too frightened. For Shamus O'Thames had plainly seen the face of death, and felt on his forehead the cold possessive touch of a hand from which there is no eventual escape. Had it been withdrawn, he wondered without caring much, or was this a mere respite?

With time and careful nursing, his body, though still largely a matter of skin and bones, began to respond with the resiliency of youth. And in step with resurging life, his surroundings as-

sumed importance and interest. He was in a mission, he knew, somewhere on the northern coast of New Guinea, under the skillful care of the jovial priest who had rescued him. Beyond that he knew little.

He could almost measure the accretions of strength which accompanied the frequent visits of the black eyes, for it was impossible to remain unaffected by the presence of this man. The giant cleric would come bursting into the room, and swirling in with him there flowed such an atmosphere of energetic power that it was like a strong wind blowing lustily around a headland.

He was always dressed in the same manner—a black full-length skirted cassock, with a rosary around his neck, from the bottom of which there hung suspended a large gilt crucifix. And as he rushed into the room with long and forceful strides, the great muscles of his bare legs seemed to be bursting out from beneath the cassock at each step. But whenever he came to visit Shamus it was never to sit with dour sympathy by his bedside; he always came with tidings of one sort or another.

A great shouting would usually herald his approach while still a hundred yards distant. Then the door would burst open and the tornado was loose in the room, with eyes burning excitedly and a fierce and turbulent energy issuing from him. "Stone the crows! Look at this!" he would bellow. He loved using, and often misusing, strange Australian expressions like that. He might, perhaps, be holding aloft a fresh green ear of corn, the tassel waving like a triumphant banner about his head. His face alight with happiness he would shout with the boundless merry enthusiasm of a child, talking in excited, staccato words and phrases, in which creative fantasy was mixed with exact facts and figures.

"Look! My corn!" he would cry. "Isn't it wonderful? It's grown an inch and a half longer than last year. I've just measured. Everything gets bigger and bigger. Stone the crows! Amazing, isn't it?"

Then, stepping close to Shamus's bed, he would thrust the green ear almost into his face, until the tassel tickled his nose, and the sick man would forget that he was sick, feeling a communicating excitement, and with it a surge of renewed energy, even though the ear of corn, honestly examined, looked exactly

as he would have expected an ear of corn to look.

On another day, it was a small Kanaka child, naked save for a bandage on one leg, that the priest carried uproariously on his shoulder, handling the composite of flesh and bone quite as he had the ear of corn, and showing no difference in his excitement and enthusiasm. It was as though corn and boy grew side by side on green stalks under his expert husbanding, and each was a potential exhibit for a county fair. Shamus's heart missed a beat as the huge man hurled the child aloft, and laughed mightily as the little fellow came to rest in the crook of his brawny arm, staring about him with a mixed expression which was at first dazed and then ecstatic.

The big man seemed to be exploding with pleasure. His words came tumbling and tripping over each other.

"This is my friend Pilu, son of Gona. I was midwife when he was born—pulled him out myself, and he was as stubborn as a mule stuck in a swamp. For two years he's had a tropical ulcer on his leg—so bad I was afraid I'd have to saw the leg off. But look!" Keeping the child still in the crook of his arm, and with his free hand holding up the bandaged leg like a stick, he managed to strip the bandage down to disclose a brown scab surrounded by angry red flesh. "It's nearly cured! That's modern medicine. New way of administering salvarsan. Learned it in a leaflet from Sydney. In two weeks he'll be able to walk. Isn't it wonderful?"

Limply Shamus watched little Pilu soar into the air once more and agreed that it was indeed so, but with the unspoken thought that the child's survival from being tossed about in the air like that was even more remarkable.

"Pilu's one of my best specimens," the priest went on merrily. "Look at the size of him! That may not mean anything to you, young man, used to Australian plainsmen—or whatever grows wherever you came from—but let me tell you something. When I came here the average height of the men of this village was five feet two and a half inches! And that half inch I added out of Christian charity when I figured it! Diet! They'd never eaten properly. Bones starved—all of them. I taught them how to eat. Now, after only twenty years, they stand five feet four or five. And no charity needed to stretch the tape. Pilu's already an inch

and a half taller than children his age were ten years ago. Have to take care of their bodies before you can do anything for their souls. Soul and mind and body—all twisted up together like a ball of yarn. *'Mens sana in corpore sano'!*"

He set Pilu on the edge of the bed, poked him in the ribs with a big thumb, burst into a gale of laughter, and gave himself a mighty wallop on the rump, as a child would when playing horse.

"Amazing, isn't it?" the missionary roared. "Can you imagine what will happen when we have proper medical missions? All up and down the coast, and in the interior, too! We'll even bring Anitok into line and put inches onto the height of his little men. Inches? At least a foot, or my name's not Johannes Kirshner. Don't you think so?"

"It seems inevitable that you'll produce a race of giants," Shamus agreed dryly. "Merely a question of time, isn't it?" Then he looked up quickly, anxiously. Had he spoken tactlessly? There was no reason for giving an impression of sarcastic belittlement. But the bearded face above him was beaming with joy.

"Ho ho!" he roared. "You speak like a human being once more—like a man in a body instead of a spirit without one. I shall raise a special *Te Deum*. Ha, my boy! You'll soon be climbing coconut palms like a monkey!" He placed a huge, but amazingly light, hand on Shamus's shoulder. "You're tired," he said, gently. "I must let you rest. And, besides, I must go to the carpenter shop to see how my sloop is getting on. My Kanakas go to sleep if I don't keep an eye on them. I figured out last night that the boat should carry three and a quarter tons of copra—that is, if she'll float when we're finished."

He laughed heartily as he said it. Apparently the notion of a boat sinking at her launching seemed a most amusing possibility to him.

"You'll be up and around any day now, Mr. O'Thaymus, and since you're a sailor, I'm anxious for you to see her. By the way," he added, suddenly, "we've often wondered whether that's the way you say your name."

"It's pronounced O'Tems." Shamus smiled. "Like the river in England. But I don't mind."

"Ah, thank you," beamed the priest. "Those English T-h-e's.

You never know where you are. You know my name, don't you? Kirshner, Father Johannes Kirshner. Shamus O'Thaymus. I'm sorry that's not the way you pronounce it because it's got a nice sound. Still it must be said right. O'Tems. Well, then, I'll just call you Shamus."

"Of course," Shamus smiled, then hesitated, as if he wanted to say something more.

"Ah, yes, you're probably troubled about many things." The priest nodded with smiling understanding. "Blackwater does that—leaves gaps in the mind. Well, don't worry—I'll fill some in for you, and gradually the others will come back by themselves."

"I was wondering about my schooner, the *Maski*."

"Oh, quite all right. As carefree as her name. Your bosun, Tulare, sailed her almost to our door a week ago. Wonderful that he could handle her alone. Don't you think so? But God gave him a calm sea. And so she's lying anchored in the lagoon now. Tulare searched all up and down the coast for you and was wild with joy when he heard you were alive. I'm making a Christian of him so he can thank God properly. He told me you had gone into the mountains to look for gold."

"I gave him strict orders to wait for me and not move."

"He obeyed until you were three weeks overdue."

"That long?"

"Longer. You've been here on your back another two weeks. A queer thing, the blackwater virus. Sometimes you went into a coma so deep we could find no spark of life in you. And sometimes you shouted and fought so hard that I thought I might have to sit on your head. That was when you were beginning to get well, of course. Now you must rest."

With a ferocious growl which emerged comically from behind his smile, he swung the naked Pulu up from his perch on the edge of the bed, making the child giggle as the huge beard tickled his stomach, and turned toward the door.

"One more thing," Shamus asked quickly. "What of the rest of my men?"

For the first time, Father Kirshner's face really sobered. "Anitok," he said shortly, as though that were answer enough. "Vetoma and I went back after we had made you comfortable

here, and searched for them. Your bosun tells me there were seven and yourself in all. We buried five and I blessed their graves. The other two? Dead or alive, they are in the hands of God."

"Did one of those whom you buried have the figure of a naked woman tattooed on his chest?" Shamus persisted. He had wondered especially about Dumai, the younger brother of his bosun, Tulare, and next to Tulare, his best man. Dumai was one of the Kanakas who, like Tulare, Shamus valued not only as a member of the crew, but also as a friend.

Around the edges of Father Kirshner's beard spread a faint pinkness. Shamus noted it with surprise. Was it possible? Could it be that the huge priest was capable of blushing?

"Now would a holy father notice such things as you speak of?" he asked, in mock rebuke. Then, relaxing, he roared with laughter again. "But I shall not pretend with a sick man. I assure you that Johannes Kirshner would notice. As he noticed, to his shame, the same kind of display on the chest of a man I know named Kanaka Tom. Frankly, I couldn't keep my eyes off it the day they brought him in—did daily penances for a month. But there was no such display on any of the broken bodies Vetoma and I buried."

Shamus turned his face to the wall for a moment to hide the emotion which he was sure must be showing, for he felt a sudden surge of gladness. Perhaps Dumai had escaped, then, and was even now hiding in the jungle and planning a way to reach a coastal village from which he might one day rejoin the *Maski*.

"And who is Kanaka Tom?" he asked, turning back to face Father Kirshner once more.

"A strange, puzzling individual," the priest answered. "A tall Kanaka who is somehow in league with Anitok. My men once found him unconscious far up the river, with a spear wound through his shoulder and a broken skull. They brought him back here and he got well and went back to Anitok. He would never tell us how he got hurt like that. The rascal! I made him wear a shirt around the mission here after I saw—"

He stopped, and again Shamus noted a sort of embarrassed diffidence spread over his face.

"What was it you saw?"



"Hm! Well, if I didn't wear this cassock, I could tell you better. An amazing piece of pornography. A female figure capable of the movements of the living—done with an intricate skill which, better employed, might have produced art. Said he had it done in Sydney. But really it is a matter best not discussed. The limbs spread over the chest muscles such a way that—" He broke off with a helpless gesture. "Mind you, I'm not saying it wasn't amusing—at least some people might think so," he added, quickly. "Stone the pelicans! Now I suppose I ought to do penance again—just remembering."

Shamus found himself smiling. He was familiar enough with the kind of tattooing a Kanaka would likely have done in Sydney, to get a general idea of the animated spectacle which would assail the well-disciplined chastity of a priest's mind. He changed the subject quickly.

"You keep mentioning Anitok as though I knew about him. I don't. Who is he?"

"A little tyrant with a twisted mind. A ruler of a tribe of mountain Pygmies who have terrorized the Great River region. I've never seen him myself, but some of my Kanakas did once. He's not much bigger than Pilu here, they say, but he seems to have some strange power over his people. He's not one of them. He and Kanaka Tom appeared among them from no one knows where only a few years ago, killed their weak head man—those Pygmies never have any kind of a firm and stable organization—and took over. Since then, they have used their poisoned arrows, their stone-headed clubs, their spear-lined pit traps, and every other invention of the devil, to eliminate or control neighboring tribes. They have burned villages and slaughtered their inhabitants. Of one group of a hundred Kanakas who once made an expedition against them, not one returned. Anitok now claims a preposterous strip of territory along the river clear down to the sea. He keeps sending scouting parties farther and farther. It was without doubt his men who attacked you. He hates white men especially. Kanaka Tom told me it was because a white woman once laughed at him. How is that possible? Where would he have come close enough to white women to be laughed at, do you suppose? And why?"

He paused and looked inquiringly at Shamus, as if in ac-

knowledge that the younger layman would know more about such things. "I can't imagine." Shamus shook his head. "Has he ever attacked your mission?" he asked.

Father Kirshner laughed.

"Ah, my boy! You are as yet unversed in the ways of God. We are as safe from Anitok here as we would be in the center of Hamburg. Kanaka Tom—don't you see? God sent him to me long before Anitok was strong enough to have dared attack us. Now Tom thinks of me as a friend. But there is more than just protection in it. Tom will one day be the path by which I shall carry the word of God to Anitok and his savages. Well! I must be off!"

And before Shamus could speak again, he was gone as he had come, like a great and boisterous gust of wind, leaving Shamus almost gasping for breath, and with plenty to think about as he turned his face, and his gaze wandered through the window and past the fringe of roof thatching which hung before it to the tall straight trunks of the coconut and pandanus trees which marked the edge of the forest.

Far beyond the forest, beyond the reach of the physical eye, he was seeing a picture which something Father Kirshner had said had evoked from the past—a white woman laughing, and her laughter a dagger in the heart of a shy and sensitive boy. It *was* possible, he was thinking; laughter, if you cared enough, could have as sharp an edge as any steel.

### *Chapter Three:* MEG BARSTOW

FIVE weeks! He could remember certain episodes, even the approaches of those strange fallings away of his memory which left gaps in his mind. But the between times, when he had lived in a half-lit world in which reality merged into fantasy, were beyond him. Though oddly enough he seemed to have been aware at all times of the giant figure of Father Kirshner by his bedside, eyes filled with that look of deep, embracing compassion. It was unforgettable, the feeling of revitalization which his presence always brought.

But something else troubled his memory. A face, another face which prodded sweetly, insistently, at his need to remember.

Was it a reality? Was it someone whom he had really seen? Or was it merely a vision of peace and quiet provided by a kindly nature to prevent his nightmarish fantasies from becoming too bitter to bear? Shamus was sure that he had seen the face twice at least. It slipped in and out of his befogged memory of a night of horror in which he had seemed to be reliving the attack in the jungle. He was trying violently to get up and escape, and something was holding him back, when the face bent over him. At first he thought it was his mother—violet-gray eyes, the smooth high forehead, the lips even, might have been his mother's. But why would his mother be wearing a starched white hood? But of course it was absurd—the notion of his mother in New Guinea. So young! Younger than the memory of his incredibly young mother, and as beautiful. He had tried to call her by name, and, as she seemed to be receding from him, tried again, desperately, to reach her, to tell her it was all right now that he was dying. Fear—it must have been fear, he told himself. He had never really liked his mother. But then the black eyes and the beard were above him again and strong hands held him down. He struggled mightily until he felt another pair of hands holding one of his own, warm and soft and tender. Then, in the confusion of his temporarily shattered mind, it seemed to him that he had reached his mother at last and he was still.

At another time, when he seemed to be coming back from some indescribably dark and empty death-like distance, he had been briefly conscious of the rim of a cooling glass of water at his lips. He swallowed eagerly, without thought, and then, raising his eyes, found again the blue-gray eyes of his mother looking gravely, tenderly, at him, and the thin warm lips, and the starched white hood. But now he liked her, felt the soft cool touch of her fingers on his cheek for a blessed living moment, and then the darkness swept over him once more.

Were these things real? Had they happened? Or were they only fever-born fantasies, like the swarm of thousands of gnome-like Pygmies who had rushed through his window one night, carrying no spears or stone-headed clubs, but equipped with curved stings like scorpions, and having, instead of hands, the powerful claws of giant lobsters? Or like the spear-lined pit trap which had one night seemed to yawn beneath his bed, its lips

moving in a hideous persistent rhythm like a working mouth, nibbling now, drawing the bed and him farther into the sucking gap which would, in a moment, devour them both?

There were earlier moments of which he could be sure. He could remember, almost with the detachment of a spectator, the ambush in the jungle, when, one by one, five of his party, natives who had trusted him with the blind trust of children, had been slaughtered by the attackers. At last he, and the two boys who had been left alive—Dumai and Satadeai—had sat in a small jungle clearing, waiting for death, in the rain. That rain! The whole disaster, even the imminent approach of death, might not have been so bad but for the rain. To sit for hours, saturated, cornered like a bunch of drowning rats! And not even a smoke. The deluge had turned his tobacco and matches into a sodden mess. It was true, he reflected, that when waiting to be murdered the dignity of a man's last moments may quite easily depend upon a cigarette.

Curiosity and love for strange places, even more than his desire to pay his debts and make a new stake, were what had undone him. For months he had been wanting to examine the truth of a story which had been told him by a native—of bright hard yellow lumps in the sand of a river bed at the base of a waterfall a long day's travel in from the coast. The story had gnawed at him, and he had waited only until an opportunity presented itself. It came with a cargo for the *Maski* from Rabaul to the government post at Port Moresby.

Hastily, before sailing, Shamus had loaded a few picks and shovels and tin pans for washing sand. With his cargo delivered, he had put to sea again at once, rounded South Cape, thrust out of his mind the thought that he might, with luck, pick up a profitable cargo of copra or yams at Goodenough Island, and sailed on beyond Cape Nelson where he put in according to bearings which the native had carefully given him. Then, leaving Tulare on guard with the *Maski*, he and the rest of the crew worked their way inland through the murderous jungle. They found the stream all right, though it had taken them two days instead of one, and the waterfall, floating over the cliff like a tremulous jeweled ribbon. At its base it had scooped out a pool in the sand four feet deep. Looking at its cool beauty Shamus

forgot, for the moment, that he had come for gold, in the sweet contemplation of a bath beneath that gleaming loveliness. He set his men about preparing food, stripped, leaving his rifle and revolver on the bank beside his clothes, and reveled for a moment in the sweet refreshment of the water which surged about his waist and fell like silver light over his head.

But only for a moment. A sudden stinging pain ripped at his shoulder and a spear clattered against the face of the cliff and sank back into the water. Fortunately the thrower's aim was bad, for the spear had only torn the flesh, Shamus realized as he jumped for the shore, scooped up clothes and guns, and joined his men.

But now spears, arrows, and sling stones were falling all about them, and from the forests came the sharp reports made by lashes on the attackers' slings, which cracked with each throw, as loudly explosive as a drover's whip or a rifle. One of the first spears went clear through the belly of Kupare, the gunbearer standing beside him. He could still hear the weird sound the blade made as it passed through the man's body and entered the yielding trunk of a tree fern behind. And the man's shriek. And how surprised he looked as he gripped the shaft protruding from his belly.

Sounds made the most vivid recollections. The dwarfed little man he shot in the neck, for instance. The bullet had dropped that one on his face. Then suddenly he had leaped up and gone scrambling off into the bush on all fours, his head hanging half off. Through the gaping hole in his neck had issued a most peculiar sound, something like the squeal of a young pig. He looked like a young pig, too. But then they were all so strangely small, the attackers, like a swarm of evil gnomes, though it was only in brief shadowy glimpses that he had seen any of them.

Uncoordinated memories, vignettes of sight and sound in unstable time, in time that had no pattern and no measurement, no progression from one event to another, and great gaps with nothing to mark them—

That noise like the squealing of a pig, for instance, associated itself with another—of his teeth chattering with fever in macabre rhythm to the deep thudding boom of the garramuts, the New Guinea drums of death, inexorably closing in on the little group

from every side, though he had no idea of what had transpired from the time of the initial attack to that of the onset of his fever. Probably the hated rain had saved them by obliterating their tracks in the jungle. When at last the sound of the drums began to fade away, he remembered thinking it must be a trick of hearing his fever was playing on him.

From the time the search passed them by he remembered almost nothing. How long he and Dumai and Satadeai had hidden in the jungle he could not guess. How he had got to the coast he did not know. For the clearing must have been at least two days' travel from the sea. How had two boys dragged or carried him down those precipitous mountain trails while they were still fleeing and in mortal fear for their lives? Why had they been willing to burden themselves with a white man—especially one with blackwater fever? Powerful native superstitions prevail about the evil fever which brings black foam to a man's mouth. As it sends him mad, turning his whole body a sultry gray, the forces of malignant spirits become free to enter it at will. It is better to leave him, for should he die suddenly the evil spirits are likely to leap upon those nearest him.

Then the hiccups, choking spasms that racked his whole frame. He remembered those all right. Even in his semiconscious condition he had realized their significance. They were sure signs that the fever had reached the stage which is relieved only by death. Survival was nothing short of miraculous. Well, one thing was certain: while he could never understand his salvation, he knew that he would not be alive had it not been for the constant, watchful care of the mighty priest. The realization caused him some disquiet when he recalled his opinion, shared by all New Guinea traders, that missionaries in general, and the Catholics in particular, were sly, greedy fellows who used religion as a cunning cloak for competition in the field of honest trade.

Lying on his bed, Shamus could see the little cemetery at the edge of the clearing, with the jungle pushing at it, the graves marked with white wooden crosses, many of them hung with wreaths of jungle flowers.

"Christian graves!" Father Kirshner had told him proudly. "When I came here there had just been an epidemic and the people were burying their dead a few inches deep under the



floors of their houses as their sorcerers told them to do. I made them drive their sorcerers out, dig up all the bodies, and put them away properly. Stone the crows, how they stank!"

Shamus looked out at the cemetery now whimsically, wondering just what spot Father Kirshner would have picked for him had he slipped over the edge of the precipice to which he had come so close. How different it was from the little burial ground at the edge of a Cotswold village which he remembered so well.

There, when he was not quite seventeen, he had stood beside an open grave while a rector had intoned the final words in the Church of England ritual for the dead over the bodies of his mother and father, and the last link with a gentle childhood had been broken. So long as he lived, those winding roads and quiet villages of the Cotswolds would seem a dream of peace and loveliness to him. Those rolling roads, even the gay and reckless and warm companionship of his girlish flighty mother on them, seemed to him the best that life could offer anyone. Yet it had been those very roads, and his mother's very gayety and recklessness, which had destroyed his childhood in the end, for, while driving his father in a car one fog-darkened night, driving too fast as she always did, she had missed a turn and killed them both.

After that, with the pattern of his life shattered, Shamus was never able to establish a new one in England. His Uncle Desmond, as guardian, had packed him off to a private tutor in Devon named Burbidge, a retired professor of mathematics from Trinity College, Dublin. As the professor's only pupil, Shamus had, for two desperately lonely years, suffered the stultifying erudite stodginess only out of deference to a certain deep-rooted prejudice on the part of his guardian.

Uncle Desmond was a man of many prejudices, but his hatred of the English public school system amounted to an obsession. "Antiquated breeding holes for fools, parsons, hypocrites, and snobs," he used to storm. "And fairies," he was wont to add angrily, which, coming from one of his excessive masculinity, may have furnished the soundest explanation for his feeling. Family legend had it that as a boy Uncle Desmond had suffered the unfortunate experience of having been chased around the

dormitory one summer evening by the captain of the cricket eleven, and cornered.

Within Burbidge's drear confines, Shamus had been forced to study a number of tedious subjects, relieved only by an interest in painting pictures, and, for a time, in a woman. Meg Barstow was almost as definitely an institution as was Burbidge's. Wherever there are students throughout the world, somewhere near them you will find a Meg—a woman both older and younger than her years, older in a certain superficial realism, yet retaining, whether she is twenty-five or forty, a spiritual and mental immaturity, and a histrionic skill which makes her seem young enough to be the ideal contemporary of any boy of seventeen or eighteen. Any boy away from home who does not fall in love with one of Meg's sisterhood has missed one of life's most revealing experiences. Some boys take it in their stride. Some take it hard. Shamus took Meg very hard indeed.

For months he went about in a cloud, seeing Meg on Wednesday evenings when Mr. Burbidge allowed him to be out until ten, walking with her along the winding roads of Devon or through the edges of the moor on Sunday afternoon, or reading poetry to her in the cozy confines of her little flat which most conveniently had an outside entrance and its own bell. Once, trying to pay Meg a compliment while being loyal to his mother's memory at the same time, he told her that she was like his mother, failing to note the hasty tightening of Meg's lips which changed quickly to a gentle smile. He told her, too, of his dreams of travel, and of accomplishment as an artist. And all the time Meg seemed to be waiting for something, listening with half an ear, though Shamus never knew it, pressing a little closer to him as they walked, stroking his hair more frequently and more gently as they sat in the shade of a beach tree in the copse on a prematurely warm spring Sunday, holding his hand a little longer each evening as she told him good night.

There was something so puzzling about it all to Meg that it became a challenge. That Shamus was her slave she knew without equivocation. Yet why did he stay at arm's length from her in spite of all her thinly veiled invitations? Over fifteen years his senior, she had felt the emotional pulse of every generation of Burbidge boys for almost as many years as there were in

Shamus's life, and was so expert that she could call her shots and notch her gun before her quarry had felt the string of the first volley. But unlike his predecessors, the more devoted Shamus became the more aloof he seemed physically. Wise to the point of knowing that his love and loneliness for his mother, which she sensed to have been somehow frustrated, had been one of the elements which had made her initial conquest so easy, she knew also that the woman now in her grave was also a barrier. Yet this situation, too, she had encountered successfully before. There was something else, something which she could not fathom.

That something else might have been explained to her if Shamus's reticence had ever broken down to the point of telling her the substance of one of the courses in his curriculum at Burbidge's. Mr. Burbidge secretly took great pride in this course. He had designed it himself in response to an outspoken demand from Uncle Desmond. "I bring the boy to you untouched," said Uncle Desmond. "See that he comes back so. Keep him celibate." And Mr. Burbidge, rising to the occasion, had instituted a course called "The Psychology of Emotions" and for the text used the controversial work *Sex and Character*, written by that gifted and emotionally twisted young Viennese Otto Weininger, and published by him at twenty-three, a few months before, in utter frustration, he had killed himself.

Weininger's easy and rigid division between the mother and the prostitute, his idealization of the one and degradation of the other, his arbitrary statement that when a man takes a woman—save for the purpose of making her a mother—he destroys her will and so is as guilty of murder as the man who destroys her life, and his defensive statement that when a man really loves a woman he does not need or greatly desire close physical association with her—all of these seemed to Shamus to fit into his desperate loneliness for his mother, his secret sense of guilt for never having loved her, and his adoration of Meg Barstow, and to furnish him with an iron determination in those moments when he found temptation strong within him to yield to the insistent hunger of his body. When the need to take her in his arms and ease his loneliness and longing in her warmly inviting flesh became too strong—if he was with her he would think of

Weininger and go away, incidentally leaving Meg gnashing her teeth with frustration. If he was away from her he would read *Sex and Character* or turn feverishly to his painting.

As to the latter, developed first out of sheer ennui, it soon became a passion. He began to paint, not occasionally, but all the time when he was not with Meg or at his studies.

Mr. Burbidge was bewildered but rather pleased, having no clear perception how poor in design and color sense Shamus's pictures really were. Feeling that he might unknowingly have nurtured another Turner or a Whistler, he wrote proudly to Uncle Desmond. Uncle Desmond, in whose world the arts reached their pinnacle in reproductions of *September Morn*, wrote back a forthright reply, one which left Mr. Burbidge quivering with rage. If the best Burbidge could do was to turn the boy into a long-haired, dirty fingernailed painter, he'd better be sent home—that was the gist of it.

For twenty-four hours the decadent tutor, seeing his income slipping from him, evaded the issue and did not reveal the contents of the letter to Shamus. And during that twenty-four hours Fate took the boy by the collar and flung him over the precipice toward which it had been quietly shoving him for some time. Unfortunately, it was a Wednesday morning when the letter arrived, and that evening Shamus went to Meg's little flat, carrying concealed under his jacket a small oil sketch—his latest and, he thought, his best. He had never shown one to her before, and now he was so diffident about it that he kept it under his jacket for a full fifteen minutes while he sat in a stiff-backed chair and Meg sat on the couch across the room which was a sofa during the day and her bed at night. She pondered means of bringing him closer. When suddenly, for no obvious reason, but probably obeying the spur of some thinly checked sexual urge, he sprang to his feet and the picture fell from its concealment. In an instant she was holding it in one hand and his hand in the other and taking them both back to the couch with her.

Sensing her moment then, and holding the picture so close that it could not have been more than a few blobs of color to her, she began to praise it with just enough extravagance to bring a bright flush to his cheeks and tears of joy to his eyes, yet not so much as to make him suspect how empty her flattery was. In a

moment he was clinging to her, uttering deep unintelligible words of longing and adoration, and the picture slipping to the floor, she was holding his head close to her breast and stroking his hair gently while her lips sought his. A moment later she freed a hand just long enough to reach over and switch off the one light in the room, and then, with a happy sigh in which was mixed an anticipatory pleasure and the satisfaction of having gained a hard-won victory at last, she lay back against the cushions and drew Shamus closer to her than he had ever been to any woman before.

It was long after Mr. Burbidge's ten o'clock curfew hour that Shamus walked back that night and quietly entered his first-floor room by the window, to lie with wide-open eyes in a humble ecstasy, reviewing in his mind the divine sweetness and nobility of Meg Barstow. Strangely, it did not occur to him that he had "destroyed her will" and so was actually "guilty of murder." For it was plain that Meg was the epitome of motherhood, and was such a woman as Weininger had written would give herself only to one who would be a fit father.

Finally he fell asleep, only to wake again as the first rays of May sunlight entered his window. Bounding out of bed he bathed, dressed, quickly but carefully, stepped out into the bright, dew-fresh morning, and walked rapidly in the direction of Meg's flat. Halfway there he broke into an eager run and fetched up at her doorstep out of breath. He drew the bellpull to him gently and was horrified when he heard what a loud clatter it made in the early morning stillness, yet almost before it had stopped tinkling he was pulling it again.

So impatient was he that he did not notice the quick look of surprise and annoyance on her face when she opened the door, or how much older and less attractive she looked in a wrinkled negligee, with her hair in curlers, her face purged of makeup, and her eyes filled with sleep. She had to repulse him to keep him from taking her into his arms there in the open doorway, and pulled him quickly into her room, there the better to cope with the situation.

"Whatever's got into you?" she asked, a little acidly. "Is this any way to carry on at six in the morning?"

He crushed her in his arms, kissing her over and over, when-

ever his lips could find bare flesh to touch, before he could speak. She sank onto the bed and, in boredom, pulled the covers over her, closed her eyes, and wished that he would go away. He had been a clumsy enough lover at midnight, in all conscience, but this, at six in the morning, was more than a woman could be expected to put up with.

He sank on his knees beside her bed and buried his face against her breast. Finally he looked up at her, his eyes adoring her, and his lips just brushed the point of her chin.

"I can't believe it yet!" he said. "When will you be ready to leave?"

She scowled in her lack of immediate comprehension. Then suddenly she remembered the broken sentences he had whispered to her the night before as they lay in bed together—something about an attic in London—painting masterpieces—eating bread and cheese—living on their love! God, the young fool had really meant it!

"Today!" he was saying. "Don't let's wait! If we were married today no one would know that our baby was born a day too soon."

Meg had coped with similar situations before, but never at six in the morning. And unfortunately, as he spoke, her surprised puzzlement brought her up to a half-sitting posture, so that the mirror across the room flung back a mocking accusation at her, telling her how old she was, telling her that she was listening to words which did not belong to her, filling her with a nameless fear. And suddenly the elements of the moment, her disheveled self and room, the rosy light of the sunrise, which she had not seen for a very long time before, the earnest, puppy-like eyes of the boy whose head lay on her breast, his prayer-like awe at this unworthy shrine, the picture he had painted of her starving for love and art in a garret, his incredible belief that she was inevitably pregnant, and—the crowning idiocy—his intimation that the calculation of such events was so exact that not a single day was to be lost, combined into a comical crazy-quilt pattern which completely broke down her studied histrionics.

At first she tried to control her laughter, and then, as it clutched at her throat, a mixture of boredom and natural cruelty urged it on. All she wanted just then was to get rid of him. She

had decided before he left her the night before that the achievement hadn't been worth the effort anyway. She would end this thing right then, she decided, once and for all, have it over with, and send this ridiculous calf mooing back to his scrawny pasture and out of her sight. Her laughter rose from her throat in harsh waves of ridicule.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned. "I think you're mad! Can you see me in an attic? Washing diapers with one hand and cleaning my artist's palette with the other!" She was off in a storm of laughter again which made words impossible. Then she saw the whiteness of his face and felt the sudden terrifying stiffness of his body as he raised his head, pulled away from her, and stood up, slowly, painfully, as if he were lifting a great weight, his eyes terrible to see. Her laughter was frozen by the icy fire in those eyes, and her voice shook a little as she spoke. "Listen, duckie, there's going to be no baby—now or later. Take your fun but don't make such a hard thing of it! And don't wake me at six in the morning again."

No answer came from the white, set lips. For a moment his eyes, staring at her in unbelief, seemed to be repositories for all the concentrated pain and rage of the world; then they fell, and he saw the oil sketch lying on the floor where she had dropped it the night before. The sound which came now from the depths of his being was something which Meg felt more than heard, a low voiceless vibration of utter hopelessness and despair. Savagely he ground his heel into the sketch, turned, and ramrod erect, walked out the door without looking back. For years Meg was to be reminded of that moment by a spot of magenta oil color so deeply ground into her bedside rug that she was never able to get it out, which annoyed her considerably, for she was actually quite a tidy person.

Back at Burbidge's Shamus climbed into his window just in time to hear the breakfast bell, and, having brushed his hair once more and straightened his jacket, calmly, silently, his face a mask, he went to the dining-room to sit opposite the table from Mr. Burbidge.

It was after the worried tutor had said his stilted grace, and while Shamus was eating his porridge, that Mr. Burbidge handed him Uncle Desmond's letter. Shamus read it silently and with a

strange detachment and indifference. What did it really have to do with him now? What did it matter? But he didn't say this to Mr. Burbidge. Instead, he said that the question his uncle raised would take some thought, and asked to be excused from his classes that day so that he might devote himself entirely to the problem, and to composing a letter to Uncle Desmond. Then he left the dining-room and went directly to Mr. Burbidge's small library, where he found an atlas in which he turned at once to a map of the South Seas.

He had long been a disciple of Hakluyt, and more recently had had his imagination fired by discovering in the public library a copy of Gauguin's *Private Journals*. He pondered gravely the relative attractions of the Solomon Islands, and Otahite in the Society group. In the *Travels*, Hakluyt had told of fabulous riches in the Solomons, streaks of gold running through the mountain and lying on high river beds. But Shamus concluded that if any truth attached to the ancient's tales, someone must certainly have put it to the test in the last hundred years.

To the north, the vast island of New Guinea caught his attention. But a quick check-up in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* told him little: half of it Dutch, the remainder divided into an Australian Mandate and Australian Territory. It seemed to be one of the few portions of the earth's surface left unexplored, although gold, the article said, had recently been discovered there. That was enough. Shamus carried the atlas to his room and stuffed it into his bag, reflecting that the balance which Mr. Burbidge had of the money Shamus had left with him for safe-keeping would more than recompense him for the book. Then he put Weininger's *Sex and Character* into his bag beside it, closed the bag, and wondered how he could say good-by. His plans for the future were not entirely clear, but no doubt remained in his mind that the first step must be in the direction of independence, and, to achieve that, gold or its equivalent was the first requirement. He decided against seeing his tutor again, wrote a brief note, systematically and coldly burned in his fireplace all of his oil sketches, and quit the house of Burbidge in silence.

Except for the doubtful truths he learned from Meg, the years spent in the academic seclusion of his tutor's home had not only



taught young Shamus next to nothing, but had likewise failed to prepare him for the most elementary experiences to be encountered in the outside world. His peculiar upbringing, coupled with Meg Barstow, had pushed him from boyhood to manhood in one shattering rush, without that intermediate play of adolescent experience which acts as a stabilizer in the current of mature life. And the impact of the sudden transition was plainly written upon him.

Tall and lithe, with a thin ardent face to match, he was a spectacular-looking young man. Light hair, later on always sunburnt to a straw color at the ends, and invariably disheveled, topped a smooth unfurrowed forehead. Gray eyes, cool and widely set, and a bit too beautiful, gazed out with a curiously intent and eager expression, as if puzzled at not coming to rest upon someone long overdue. But his deportment was the most remarkable thing about him. He carried himself with ramrod stiffness at all times, and his speech was marked by an exaggerated courtesy. This queer set of Chesterfieldian manners, probably subconsciously adopted from the goodly Burbidge, struck people as extremely comical in one so young. But it also served to keep them at a distance, and Shamus was not above profiting from his manner, for it masked a very real shyness. Otherwise his every movement possessed a sort of springy impatience, as if he were holding himself in check only with great effort. He made friends with difficulty and acquaintances found his chief characteristic an almost incredible naïveté.

There must be, of course, special friendly planetary influences set to watch over the destinies of the unworldly. For how else would such a sheltered young man have survived the voyage in the stokehold of the tramp steamer *Aberdeen Star*? Day after day he shoveled fine coal dust, which, when dampened by water, is the hardest kind of coal to shovel, in a temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. By the time the *Star* reached Rabaul, he was as thin as catgut and as tired as a sweated seamstress. But he was happy.

At Rabaul he jumped ship and, with a few pounds in his pocket, set out to satisfy his appetite for the South Seas in an attempt to swallow all of Melanesia at a sitting. Six years had passed since then. He had stoked on tramp island steamers from

the Bismarck Archipelago to the New Hebrides. He had bought wood carvings on Iwa to sell to government recruits at Port Moresby, had joined a gold-hunting party on Woodlark, and netted ten pounds for his share of their scant find made before natives drove them off; he had handled the broad wooden clubs and carved and painted ebony shields of the Trobriands and learned there how to use the gall of a certain fish to poison arrowheads. He had solved the mysterious question of the "bush telegraph" by teaching himself to read the signals pounded on drums, which can send a message to distant natives on New Guinea almost as fast as if by modern telegraph. On Goodenough Island he had learned, at the cost of a month's lameness, how natives discourage those who would track them by placing tiny foot spears in their trails. Along the Gulf of Papua he had avoided losing his head to the Kuku Kuku only by lying almost motionless in a spot in the jungle for two days. He had learned from natives how to spend incredibly long minutes submerged and how to kill fish, not with a fishing line, but under water. Along the Fly River he had seen a native commit suicide by climbing to the top of a coconut tree and fling himself, head downwards, to the ground. At Wedau, he had watched nursing women fish by leaning over a stream and milking their own breasts into the water, then quietly scooping up with a hand net the little fish that rose to the cloudy bait. He felt that he had seen something of that which he had sought.

Especially fitted for nothing but ready for anything, he had found his chance to make a stake when on Goodenough Island he had been unexpectedly offered the opportunity to run a coconut plantation. He had just landed there broke on a tramp schooner when he encountered a worried-looking white man named Endersby. Over a drink the plantation owner confided that he'd been having trouble keeping a white superintendent. He paid good wages, but he had a tough bunch of natives, and one after another his overseers would leave. He looked at Shamus's lean toughness. Did Shamus know anything about running a plantation?

The look which spread over Shamus's face indicated how inept the question had been. Running a plantation! Why, off and on, it was all he'd been doing for the past ten years, he as-

sured Mr. Endersby blandly, although actually the most he knew was looking at one from a distance. The job was his on the spot. But as Mr. Endersby left the bar, Shamus lagged behind long enough to whisper to the friendly Irish bartender, "How do you run a copra plantation?" The bartender winked at him slowly. "You don't. You bloody well ask the boss boy everything you don't know, and let him run the show for you."

The friendly tip had saved Shamus's skin. Faced with a row of twenty tall Kanakas ready to work the next morning, Shamus had calmed the sudden panic which had swept through him by gripping his walking stick very tightly and leaning on it with seeming nonchalance, had given them a quick, hardboiled pep talk about what he would expect of them, and then had called the boss boy out of line for a conference. After asking the tall intelligent Kanaka a few routine questions and hoping he wasn't betraying his ignorance, he had told him to carry on with the men. It had been simple, really. He spent most of his time swaggering about the plantation with his walking stick which gave him an air of authority, looking wise and tough. He quickly picked up just enough knowledge to be able occasionally to burst upon them like an avenging justice with a violent command that they correct something which was being done too sketchily. But for the most part he left the technical knowledge to the boss boy and confined himself to keeping them in line with a combination of a cane in his hand which could smart when brought down on a bare back, a gun at his hip which he never had to use, and a restrained friendliness and rigid sense of fair play.

Since there was no opportunity for him to spend a cent he had his stake in a year and, satisfied with the amount, hopped a tramp steamer to Rabaul. There he found quickly what he was looking for—a ship being offered for sale by a Chinese company. After ten hours of haggling over the price, he gave the Chinese owners his year's wages as a down payment, borrowed the rest of the amount which he needed from Burns Philp and Company, and became owner, in name anyway, of the *Maski*.

To the running of a trading schooner, he applied the same principle of bluff as he had to the plantation, by telling the Kanaka bosun to carry on until he could find out for himself.

Meanwhile, he trod his own deck with a restrained lordliness, carrying copra for the most part, but taking on whatever profitable commission came his way. For a while he and his ship had served the government station at Port Moresby. He had taken one gold-hunting party against his own protests to a region where Shamus knew there had never been any gold found. For several weeks the ship had been the home of a party of naturalists from America.

During all of this time, though outwardly unchanged, Shamus was learning—nothing, it is true, of those things which Uncle Desmond had intended should be taught him, but a certain wisdom in the art of living eagerly, of sailing a ship to strange places and making a living at it, of how to appraise men, the kind of men who would be living in this kind of a land, and, above all, the priceless lore of how to out-manuever and control them. But as for the female of the species, as the saying goes, he might as well be back in the monastic precincts of Mr. Burbidge's with no Meg in the offing. White women in the South Seas were even scarcer than honest men are the world over. Anyway, this was only one fact fitting perfectly into the plan of life which Shamus had accepted the day that he left Mr. Burbidge's.

For weeks, after leaving Burbidge's, he had fortified himself for his planned lifelong celibacy with great doses of Weininger's *Sex and Character*, not bothering any more to use analytical reasoning to decide whether the Viennese was right or wrong. He believed the decadent and destructive theories of sexual defeat because he wanted to believe them, to make his determined celibacy easier to bear. He had long since left the book behind him at some island stop, but its tenets were so deeply impressed upon him by then that he needed it no longer.

Once, after long and careful thought, he had made an important decision. He had tried the "mother" type in Meg and the trial had shattered him. Then why should he not ease his restlessness at the opposite pole of emotion? If this was murder of the will, as Weininger said, then murder of women's wills took place every night all over the world, and women seemed to like it.

To the astonishment of some acquaintances, who had long regarded his celibacy with awe, he bought a young native girl for

a mistress. She was pretty, without much tattooing, and terribly shy, and always wore a flower in her hair. Unfortunately, her shyness combined with that of Shamus to create so high a barrier that the liaison proved unsatisfactory and an embarrassment to both. To Shamus's relief, however, she eventually ran off with one of his boat's crew, a handsome Kanaka boy from her own village, and he concluded the affair happily ended. But one day, several months later, the chief from whom he had bought the girl turned up on board with her, welts across her shoulders, her dark eyes burning with sullen resentment at the gaping Shamus.

"Here she is," the chief announced, triumphantly, "and she's been well beaten—she won't run away again. We beat the man, too."

Shamus thanked him and settled everything by telling him to keep the presents—fifty shillings, two pigs, and some shell money—and to give the girl back to her lover.

After that he sailed alone, with a certain peace of mind, like a man who has tried smoking opium for the second time and found out for certain he can take it or leave it alone. It was, he was convinced, much simpler to leave it alone.

#### *Chapter Four: A VISION WITH VIOLET-GRAY EYES*

THE mysterious blackwater virus, though quick to kill, itself dies slowly. So that, as Shamus dragged himself around the mission after Father Kirshner allowed him to get up, waiting for the healthy blood of his youth to purge itself of the poison which had violated it, he was afforded one of those rare pauses in life seldom granted to healthy men—time—time for reflection and personal stock-taking.

It was a remote, almost forgotten, outpost of civilization in which he found himself, a collection of tiny thatched huts constituting the village which Father Kirshner had found upon his arrival, a chapel, a rectory, a convent, and a dormitory for the native helpers. Just outside the village proper was Father Kirshner's coconut plantation where, every morning soon after dawn, the natives were busily astir. Water buffaloes plodded along between the rows of tall coconut trees, drawing heavy-timbered carts piled high with the nuts, ripe for splitting; laborers dug

and hoed the soil at the base of the palms; others stripped the covers from the trays of coconut meat, being dried as copra, to expose them to the morning sun.

On his first morning out Shamus loitered about the laborers for a few minutes, whimsically picturing the tough bunch whom he had once directed, with the indispensable assistance of the boss boy, on Goodenough Island, then, as rapidly as his weakened condition permitted, he walked back and began slowly pacing the single street of the village, looking about, and lingering where he had a clear view of the convent. He walked the length of the street, turned and retraced his steps, always keeping his eyes on the convent as long as possible without seeming conspicuously to do so. Once he was sure he saw a movement through the window of the low, thatched building. He could have sworn that someone had been passing the window, but had stopped at one side and looked out onto the street a moment before going on. But he could not be sure whether it was man, woman, or child he had seen. The interior was so darkened by the wide overhang of the thatched roof, even on New Guinea, one could not simply stand and stare obviously.

A moment later a native woman quietly came out the door of the building, and, without looking at him, passed on into the village. Shamus shrugged, smiled a little foolishly to himself, and turning toward the harbor, walked away. After all, why look for something when he did not know what he was looking for? It could have been only a fantasy! Nowhere in the South Seas, he was sure, would it be possible to find the young sweet face, the violet-gray eyes of a young white woman which he had seen in his delirium. And, granting for a moment the fact that the impossible sometimes happens, what difference could it make? In the first place, Shamus's personal stock-taking had about reached the point at which he was ready to take a trial balance, write off both profit and loss, and begin a fresh sheet. He had come to the South Seas with an appetite whetted by reading, loneliness, disgust for the Burbidge type of education, a shattering emotional experience, and what he had then thought a complete disillusionment with the (to use an ambiguity) "civilized" world into which he had been born. Now his appetite had been sated, or to put it more plainly, he had his bellyful of the

South Seas. He was going back—not to the Cotswolds or Devon, neither of which he felt he could face yet, but to London, where he would make out somehow, begin again, and find out what it was for which he was fitted. But his plan did not envision abandonment of his studied celibacy. And even if it had, how could a white-hooded nun, under the vows of a Catholic sisterhood (for if the vision he had seen was any more than a vision; she could only be a nun, couldn't she?) affect it in any way? But he worried about the vision of his convalescence nevertheless. It troubled him.

Shaking his head, and calling himself a fool for even thinking about such fantasies, he stooped suddenly to pick up a short length of stick lying in his path and, switching his legs impatiently with it, as he might have with a swagger stick, he walked to the harbor for his first look at the *Maski* since that ill-starred day when he, and seven of his crew, had left Tulare aboard her alone and gone off to search for gold. The vision in the white starched hood, he told himself, he would soon forget. At any rate he must, for his mind was firmly made up. But he knew that when he finally set sail for England there would be a bitter tug at his heart as he left behind the boat which he had so proudly called his own (blithely ignoring any claims of Burns Philp and Company on account of his debt) and which he had come to love as he was sure he would never love any woman.

The trader *Maski* was a very broad-beamed vessel of some 92 feet overall, and a shallow draft of merely eight and a half feet. It was a good thing she didn't draw any more. For in the waters she plied, six inches one way or the other often meant the difference between sliding her copper bottom over a coral reef or squatting stuck on it. She was topmast-schooner rigged, carried too little sail, and was powered with an old-fashioned, semi-Diesel engine that drove the native mechanics insane. With the exception of the steaming hot foc'sle, rarely used except as a gear and sail locker, her entire below-decks were given over to cargo space. On deck a tarpaulin awning, which had once been white, stretched almost a third of her length, from the stern to the mainmast, with folding sides that could be let down at any angle for shade from the tropical sun.

She was a clumsy sailer, chock-full of clever cockroaches, slow

on the helm, but a good sea boat. And at a pinch, or when freight rates were high, she could carry about 80 tons of copra. Besides Shamus, the ship's complement consisted of eight mop-haired Kanakas, a ship's cat named Hercules, and a pet wild pig named Tikis, a freakish runt of a razorback who had never grown much larger than a terrier, but possessed of such an evil and arrogant disposition it was lucky he hadn't.

Aft, under the poop-deck awning, Shamus lived in lofty and remote state, amid the simple accouterments of a South Seas trading lugger's skipper; several canvas chairs surrounded a sizable table, with slats spaced lengthwise to keep dishes from sliding around at sea. With the slats removed it could be used as a chart table. On the starboard side an ancient phonograph stood on a painted packing case. The port side was given over to a stout canvas hammock and two more painted packing cases crudely partitioned into shelves to hold a large assortment of books.

By the railing near the stern stood a weird contraption—a fabulous and unique refrigerator, prima-donnaish and high-strung, operated by two metal balls filled with chemicals, which, when one of them had been heated, produced some sort of reaction which once had made ice, so legend had it. Always unpredictable and skittish, the crew hesitated to approach it—it had once blown the steward clean overboard. Now Shamus used it only for storing things—especially books, which would otherwise have been chewed up by cockroaches.

In a cuntry where phonograph records were not only scarce, but liable to wilt in the moist heat, the *Maski's* selection was one more of expedience than taste. But certainly it had range. Gilbert and Sullivan predominated, with a number of songs in German, Japanese, and Chinese. A couple of others, more or less in the English language, Shamus had discovered among a pile in the Kuo Min Tang hall opposite Ah Chee's in Rabaul. One of these, called *The Mountain Ain't No Place for Bad Men*, was now barely audible due to constant use, being a great favorite on board, together with another choice, *The Black Bottom*. The strange, unintelligible argot of these two ballads, some primitive affinity in the barbaric rhythm, would hold all hands entranced of an evening under sail.

He found the schooner tied up at a dock beside a small ware-



house which Father Kirshner had apparently built to use in loading copra. He did not know what he had expected, but certainly it was not the sight which met his eyes. Five of his crew, he knew, were dead in the jungle. Two others were either dead, prisoners of a murderous little savage named Anitok, or trying to find their way out of the jungle. Tulare alone was left, and what can one man—even as good a man as Tulare—do on a ship the size of the *Maski*? Everything would be dirty, disordered, neglected. The deck, on whose shining whiteness he had always prided himself, would be covered with dirty footprints and litter. There would be a sad, mournful silence about the ship, an air as of the tomb. He wondered what had happened to the ship's cat Hercules, and the pet wild pig Tikis. Probably starved, or wandered away from the ship to seek their own living.

But what he saw was not like that at all. As he rounded the copra warehouse which was at the end of the dock, with only the bow of the *Maski* in view, he heard a familiar voice giving an order. Then he saw Tulare, leaning nonchalantly against the rail, smoking a cigar of native tobacco rolled in toilet paper, and directing two Kanakas who were scrubbing the decks with sand and coconut husks. A third Kanaka was coiling a rope in the bow. A fourth was painting the longboat, a job which Shamus had intended for months to have done. And a fifth was on his way aloft to some task which Shamus could not guess from where he stood. It was as though his full crew were aboard, readying the ship for a voyage. But he had no crew!

It was as unbelievable as the vision of violet-gray eyes and white hood. Scowling, shaking his head weakly as if to disperse a haze before his eyes, he walked quietly along the narrow gang-plank and stood on deck before Tulare saw him. And then, for a moment, Shamus's wonderment at the unexpected scene of activity and neat clean orderliness were forgotten in the warmth of his bosun's welcome.

"Taubada!" he exclaimed, coming forward quickly, his eyes bright with joy. "You come. I wait very long."

"I know, Tulare. Too long." Then he looked again at the other five Kanakas who had stopped their work and were staring at him, grinning, their faces reflecting some of Tulare's joy. "Belong wha' name?" he asked.

Tulare looked at him reproachfully. "Taubada not have to need speak Pidgin to Tulare," he scolded. "Taubada ownself teach this very well English."

Shamus grinned. "Sorry," he said. "I've been sick a long time. Who are these men, Tulare?"

"If Taubada satisfy it is new crew. Other Taubada belong God say take. Keep if bully. Send home to Rabaul if stink."

Shamus looked out to sea and his eyes misted a little. Odd, how physical weakness damaged the barriers by which one customarily kept emotions in check. So the generous hand of Father Kirshner had even provided him with a crew which was apparently ample and ready to take him back to Rabaul. He had sailed the *Maski* with six men before. He could do it again. And fill the complement at Rabaul. Again he recalled how he had thought of missionaries as parasitic nuisances!

He tried to cover his emotion with gruffness. "Do they know anything about a ship?"

Tulare grinned. "Everybody good number one man. Mebbe take my job."

Shamus clapped a hand on his shoulder. "We'll neither of us worry about that," he said. "Let's have a look around."

He felt a soft warm body pressing against his leg, using it as a napkin, and stooping, picked up the ship's cat and held him under his arm as he and Tulare began to walk aft. Halfway down the deck he heard a surprised grunting, and Tikis, the dwarfed wild pig, disturbed at his nap in the sun, stood up with a snort and an oblique look of truculence, twitching his tail disdainfully as they passed. Save for the five graves in the jungle, and the two whose fate was unknown, all was as it should be. And it took no more than a quick glance to see that, thanks to Father Kirshner's foresight and generosity, and Tulare's skill and industry, he could sail as soon as he was physically able.

He walked slowly aft, joyfully feeling under his feet again his own deck, scrubbed to gleaming whiteness by the Kanakas which Father Kirshner had lent to Tulare. His own quarters again! It was like coming home after long absence. Everything was in place—the wheezy old gramophone, the erratic icebox, the low, handmade stool covered with alligator hide for which he had given a Guadalcanal native an old alarm clock that

wouldn't run, his favorite deck chair. He went to the gramophone, and was about to put on a record. And then he stopped short as he looked about him, and his glance shifted questioningly from the table to Tulare.

For in the very center of it stood a Dresden china vase which he had never seen before, and in it was beautifully arranged a bouquet of scarlet hibiscus flowers, with a few sprigs of lemon bloom to lighten the flame-like blaze with creamy white and glossy green.

Tulare smiled. "The young mission Tauberina," he said. "Every day, three days she comes with them new. Perhaps she think you come sooner."

Shamus felt a sudden thrust of emotion taking him unawares. It was with difficulty and only by virtue of years of discipline in restraint that he kept himself from actually shouting with excitement and joy. He hastily put down the record he had been holding and seized Tulare's arm just below the elbow, and the Kanaka winced in surprise as the tense fingers sank into his flesh.

"Tell me, Tulare. Has the Tauberina violet-gray eyes the color of a daybreak with the sun just rising? And does she wear a starched white hood? A big thing like a small tent?"

The bosun's eyes glowed with understanding and he nodded vigorously. "Yes, Taubada. Eyes like the clear sky before the Guba blows. And the white tent over the head with the face like a blossom of the lime tree."

Then it was true. No dream, no fever-born fantasy, but a warm living reality which had bent over him, brought water and a precious peace to drive away the horrors of his nightmares.

For a moment he hovered over the table, touching the vase with the tips of his fingers, bending to bury his face in the cool fragrance of the flowers, standing back a little to admire the fragile beauty of the vessel with its quaint blue forget-me-nots. He had seen nothing quite like it since leaving England. Then abruptly turning his back to Tulare, he quickly and silently left the ship. But he did not walk in the direction of the priest's house and the convent. He wanted to be alone. For he knew now that he was going to have to begin all over on the job of personal stock-taking and making plans for the future.

As he walked along the beach, his head bent in deep thought, he was joined by Father Kirshner's Kanaka dog, Samuel, a strangely knowing animal of picturesque appearance, who wore stripes where one would have expected spots, who looked less like a dog than a diminutive zebra, who howled often, but never barked. For a time they walked along together—at least Shamus walked, while Samuel coursed and frisked about as a dog on a beach will anywhere from Santa Monica to Brighton.

But Shamus paid little attention to him. He was trying to make the sane discipline of his thoughts still the excited pounding of his heart and his desire to sing. Absurd! He had made his plans carefully, thoughtfully, assured of the rightness of them. He would sell the *Maski*, quit this aimless existence, go back to London and establish himself. And keep his vow of celibacy as the only pattern possible to what he believed was his emotional make-up. No complications. No entanglements. A clear course ahead in a program of disciplined, constructive freedom. How could the vision of a white-hooded nun, safely barricaded behind her vows to the Church, and a Dresden china vase filled with scarlet hibiscus and lemon blooms, change any detail of that plan? And yet, he knew how strong the pull was, and was torn between his desire to follow it and to escape from it by sudden flight—as he had escaped from Burbidge's. Knowing himself, he was at once strongly of the opinion that he would take the latter course.

He was interrupted in his reverie by the sound of footsteps pounding the beach behind him, and turning saw the giant figure of Father Kirshner pursuing him at full gallop. As he looked the priest lifted up the skirts of his cassock like a woman who had just seen a mouse, and flew along at such a prodigious rate that the wind cleft his great beard in the middle. Coming abreast of Shamus he skidded to a stop, dropping the hem of his cassock.

"Stone the crows, but I love to run!" he bellowed. Then, after a moment's wind-getting: "Ha, I see your hair's coming in! Wonderful! I thought for a while that the fever might leave you bald-pated like a monk. Then we could have given you a job here. Ho! Ho!"

Shamus looked at him quickly. Was there anything back of

his words, any double meaning in his laugh? For indeed he had but voiced a flickering thought which, but a moment before, had crossed the young man's troubled mind. To stay there and be forever beside the clear violet-gray eyes and the gentle smile of his unknown vision! But he had put the preposterous thought aside as quickly as it had come. And now he put aside likewise the thought that there may have been a hidden probing behind Father Kirshner's remark, for the missionary was slapping himself on the rump again.

"You're sprouting hair on your scalp like duckweed," he cried, running his big hand over Shamus's pate. "Good! But you'll not be leaving us quite yet, I hope!"

"As soon as ever I can, I'm afraid," Shamus said shortly. "I must get back to Rabaul and about my business. Have to earn a living, you know." His words sounded ungracious and meaningless to him, for he knew that he was talking to himself even more than to Father Kirshner, convincing himself, strengthening his will to do what he must do.

"It seems to me God has taken pretty good care of you," Father Kirshner said, "while you were not about what you would call your business."

"*You* have taken good care of me," Shamus corrected, haltingly. "It's going to be pretty difficult for me to try to thank you, you know. I know it's—embarrassing to be thanked, but you know it's impossible for me ever to find a way to repay you—saving my life first of all, nursing me, taking care of me, and now even a crew for my boat—the Kanakas. They look like a good lot. Er—can you spare them? I wish I could repay you somehow."

Strangely, Father Kirshner seemed as embarrassed as Shamus, and looked steadfastly at the beach.

"I was afraid you'd feel that way," he said, slowly. "You know—accepting anything from poor missionaries, eh? So I hesitated a little about the Kanakas for fear of embarrassing you. But a trip will do them good. And how else would you get the *Maski* back to Rabaul? And though I do not mind telling you that I would like to keep you here, I know perfectly well what an empty wish that is, and I want only to help you to find your way back. . . ."

"Back?" Shamus asked in surprise. "How did you know what

I had decided? I'm going back to England, and begin all over at the beginning."

"So? An understandable decision, and I'm not surprised. But that's not what I meant. I meant your way back to God. Children are born close to him, you know. Now if that's heresy, let the bishop make the most of it. Out here one is forced away from some of the niceties of doctrine, and, anyway, it's long since I have been able to swallow the doctrine of original sin. Look at a newborn babe—whether Kanaka or white! Sinful? Ha!" He snorted disdainfully. "Wordsworth had the truth when he spoke of children 'trailing clouds of glory from God who is our home.' Unfortunately, too often the children lose him as they grow older. But you—I have watched you closely, my boy. There is something in you which will find the way back. You have courage, or you wouldn't be alive today—I don't mean the kind which made it possible for you to go into physical dangers—that you have, too—but the deeper kind which made you hang on to life when it was a mere gossamer thread. And you have feeling and kindness, the kind which made you turn your face to the wall so that I shouldn't see, when I told you of the death of your Kanakas and that one who was a favorite and a brother of your bosun—yes, Tulare has told me of that—was perhaps still alive. Repayment. My boy, you owe me nothing. It's simply that God put me where you needed me at the right time. So, if you feel gratitude, direct it to him. If you would repay, repay him." He paused and looked out to sea, his black eyes burning with a brooding fire.

"It's a complicated business, my boy, this business of working for God. In fact, some parts of it often bore me—the masses, the prayers, the ceremonials of the church, the bringing of converts to the altar—these are not God's work itself, but only the bulwarks, or, if you like, the flying buttresses which support the work. Teaching and helping human beings to live together in harmony—or, better still, health, as God intended them to—that's the backbone of it. Why, I have seen white men, who called themselves Christians, smash the toes of natives with the butts of their guns in retaliation for justified forthright words from the natives. I have a Kanaka who worked two back-breaking months on a coconut plantation and received in full payment

a worn ax which could not have cost six shillings when new. And the laborers in the goldfields—hailed off like slaves and worked in altitudes which they cannot stand, until they die like flies. I've also seen a native smash a good white man's skull with a pick, for nothing except, perhaps, the heat. It is to undo these things, my boy, and fight the devastating effects of disease and ignorance among the natives themselves that we work here."

"We?" Shamus asked, offhandedly. It seemed to him that the eyes looking at him held more than a vestige of a smile, as if they understood perfectly well that this was the nearest he could bring himself to ask the question which prodded at him.

"We are a tiny handful—Brother Arden, who has been in the interior for the past two weeks, Sister Alicia, who has worked bravely here with us for the past fifteen years, but whose time is short now, for she is old, and her companion and helper, Sister Ganice. As a matter of fact, Sister Ganice has met you, though I'm afraid that it would be not quite accurate to say that you had met her, for you were scarcely conscious of the world of reality when she was with you. Since you have been more yourself, she has not come." He paused and, after darting a fast oblique glance at Shamus, said idly, "I notice that she has kept rather closely within the convent lately."

"Really?" Shamus was conscious of the choked constraint of his voice.

"Yes." Now the priest looked at him directly and made no attempt to evade the issue.

"Ganice is young and she must have been exceedingly beautiful."

"Been?" At the other's use of the past tense Shamus looked momentarily puzzled.

"Before she entered her novitatus," the priest explained. "It is maintained in certain quarters that once having donned the veil, such things as physical beauty are of no importance. Indeed, even a moderately pleasing exterior is said to be a constant temptation to the sin of vanity."

He gave a sudden hearty guffaw. "A lot of nonsense, isn't it? Why, beauty such as Sister Ganice's should be regarded with the same humility and reverence as any of nature's fine efforts. Or like a frame of wonderful workmanship, carved to hold the

masterpiece of purity and spiritual beauty within." His smile faded and he bent upon Shamus a look both quizzical and penetrating. "Perhaps it is as well that she is so pure of spirit. It cannot be very good for her to encounter men like you."

"Me?" In Shamus's tone a certain indignation mingled with surprise.

"Yes, because you are beautiful yourself, you know."

For a long moment his eyes bored into Shamus, who felt the uneasy conviction that his innermost soul was under scrutiny.

"After all, she's quite young. And therefore quite human. A young man like you cannot fail to disturb her mind."

He paused again and his gaze wandered past the papaya trees and coconut palms which swayed in rhythmic motion to the steady pressure of the warm trade wind. When he went on his voice was low and very gentle. "She is the daughter of a man whose name would be recognized in business circles anywhere on the continent of Europe. When she was fifteen her father took it into his mind to rape her. So her mother placed her in a convent, whence, eventually, on a friend's recommendation, she was assigned to our mission and sent out here. She has been very happy in her work, she tells me, and I believe her. There is beauty even in the sound of her name, isn't there? Ganice."

He broke off suddenly and kicked thoughtfully at a piece of driftwood, and when he spoke it was seriously, in a tone not exactly of warning, but from which all of his usual joviality had disappeared. "The vows of the Church, no matter what their merits, are not always easy to keep, whether for a man or a woman. But it's a good thing to try to keep them. The easiest, not necessarily the best, defense is to make yourself stay away from those influences which tend to weaken them." Now he was looking directly into Shamus's eyes. "You are an honest man, and a strong one, I think, so I'll speak frankly to you. I know every feeling, fierce or beautiful, which suffused you when you saw Sister Ganice." He paused, and a wreath from his newly lit cigar wove into the air. "And I know the feelings which must have taken hold of her when she beheld you."

Again he paused, looking up questioningly from beneath his bushy eyebrows with a faintly troubled look, masked by the faintest smile. "But it really is necessary to think things out, isn't



it, my boy?"

"Yes," Shamus said in a low voice. He did not mention the Dresden china vase and the flowers, and Father Kirshner asked no more questions.

### *Chapter Five: GANICE*

DURING the week that followed, Shamus kept much to himself. Every morning he would resolutely turn his back on the village and the convent and, after a restless visit to the *Maski*, would walk along the beach until he reached a point at which the jungle obscured all sight of the works of man. There, after a swim, he would lie naked on the beach, letting the cleansing rays of the sun pour into his body until they drove him into the shade of a pandanus tree, where he would stretch out again, staring up into the foliage and letting his mind follow round and round the circle of thoughts which always brought him to the same conclusion—that he must leave Father Kirshner's mission and the South Seas, and take himself back to England to pick up again the threads of a life there.

It was absurd, he realized, that he must renew his determination every day, finding himself strongly pulled in another direction by one whom he had never even seen, save while he was in the throes of delirium. Yet he found that the vision of the violet-gray eyes and the white starched hood were almost constantly before him, and that there was frequently added to them the Dresden china vase with its scarlet hibiscus and lemon flowers. Twice during the week the flowers were replaced by fresh ones, "by the young Tauberina," Tulare told him each time, but he never saw Sister Ganice, and, after what Father Kirshner had told him of her, he restrained, with great effort, his desire to try to.

Finally came the day which he determined was to be his last there. The next morning he would sail with the tide. He was fit as a fiddle, he told himself—or at least fit enough so that the sea journey back to Rabaul, given any kind of luck with the weather, would finish the good work which his convalescence at the mission had begun. He made the decision lying on his back at his favorite spot along the beach, and, characteristically,

as soon as it was made, he jumped to his feet, put on his clothes, and hastened back to the village to announce it to Father Kirshner.

The missionary was coming along the village street as Shamus entered it and so without delay Shamus told him, offering no elaboration beyond the simple fact, for he knew that Father Kirshner would understand why he was not putting off his departure longer. The priest looked at him affectionately, then laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"My boy, we're going to miss you," he said gently, "but if you must go—well, anyway, you're not gone quite yet. And meanwhile," he brightened up, "I want you to see my boat. Yes, I've got to begin thinking of a name for her."

Seizing Shamus by the arm he hauled him off through the tall coconut palms of the mission grounds, rattling off a series of names. "What about the 'Leading Light'? No, too long. Or the 'Albatross'—no, Kanakas would find it difficult to pronounce 's.' Or the 'Pilgrim'? Stone the pelicans—I think I like that. How about it?"

Through the rich smell of fallen palm fronds, luscious green grass and wild flowers, they came at length to a narrow inlet opening off the beach, some distance beyond where the *Maski* was docked, and quite out of sight of the village. Here a small ship rested on the ways, nearly ready, Shamus could see, for launching.

The big man planted his legs apart and gestured proudly. "Isn't she a little beauty?" he demanded. He looked at the boat and gave a chuckle of satisfaction. "I added the keel for her myself out of a fine kawri tree we found growing in the mountains. What a time we had hauling it down the coast! It took us five days, twelve of us. And look at these fine planks in her topsides!" He gave the ship's sides a couple of mighty wallops. "Solid! It will take a lot to stove those in, my friend, won't it?"

"If you don't do it first with your fist," agreed Shamus.

"Ha!" bellowed the priest. "Good! Put a hole in her before she's in the water, that would be fine—so? She'd certainly sink then. Ah well, she'll probably have plenty of holes in her before her work is done. But stone the bloody crows! She should have been launched a week ago." He began walking around the boat

on a tour of inspection and admiration.

Once more Shamus found himself marveling at the man's incredible gusto for life, his youthful simplicity, which warmed and communicated itself to others. Here, one knew for certain, was a man with an uncanny power of attracting to himself all who approached. He had noticed how the mission natives, while they held him in a certain awe, nevertheless hung devotedly upon his every gesture. A strange life for such a man to be leading, he reflected: doctor, judge, midwife, sanitation commissioner, purveyor of vegetables, first and final fount of all authority to a Melanesian flock only recently emerged from the Stone Age.

In the Middle Ages, he supposed, such a way of life would be called "saintly," a word fallen into disuse today and one that one would pause before applying to the robust Kirshner, especially to his face. A Mohammedan would probably speak of a True Follower; a Brahmin, although he might deplore the big man's absence of mysticism, would still admit an approach to the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute of Isvara. As far as he was concerned, he decided, he would prefer some description more concrete, less subjective. At any rate, he knew this: if there were no other argument than that he would not risk hurting Father Kirshner, he dared not take the chance of complicating Sister Ganice's emotional life. He must not even see her, to try to look at her, once even. A true, if subconscious, esthete, Shamus allowed himself no compromise.

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a loud commotion. Accompanied by an assortment of squeals and shouts, the noise came from a quarter hidden from view. "Ha, I caught you! At last, I caught you!" he could hear Father Kirshner shouting triumphantly.

Shamus hurried around the other side of the boat. The priest was standing in the stream halfway up to his cassock, holding a struggling figure under water.

"So! You'll go to sleep all the time, will you?" he was rebuking someone submerged. "No wonder my boat isn't launched!"

With one powerful black-haired hand he lifted a kicking man out of the water by his belt and let him swallow a brief gulp of air. "Well, my good carpenter," he continued in tones of mild reproof, "at least you'll learn not to let me catch you. . . ."

With that he plunged the man down again. Then casting a look of helpless resignation at Shamus and quite oblivious of the man's kicking and struggling, he observed sadly, "A lazy fellow! Very lazy! But a good husband," he added brightly, in the tone of one who would see justice done. "Yes, indeed—seven children. Well, I think he should be awake by now."

"I should think so," agreed Shamus, wondering how much longer the man might have been kept submerged had he been an indifferent sire. The Kanaka shook his head like a dog which has just come out of water, and scurried away.

For a moment the two men stood looking silently out to sea, at the slow wheeling gulls and the rhythmic swells of the unbroken surface. For the first time Shamus was realizing that he would feel a tug of loss at leaving this man Johannes Kirshner, and it embarrassed and silenced him. Perhaps Father Kirshner was feeling something of the same sort of thing, for there was a shadow of cosmic sadness on his peaceful face. But suddenly he brightened, smiling at Shamus with the ingenuous sweetness of a child.

"I've an idea. Oh, quite a lovely idea. We'll give you a farewell dinner. It's seldom that we have an opportunity here to eat as though it were an occasion. Tonight we shall. You don't mind?"

"I'll love it, of course," Shamus smiled. "You're very kind—" Suddenly he was aware of the rapid beating of his heart. Father Kirshner had said "we." Could it mean that Sister Ganice would be there? He turned his face to look out over the water, that he might hide the flush of excitement which he feared would be upon it. When he looked around again, Father Kirshner was already ten feet away, holding up the skirts of his cassock and almost running, so eager was he to be at preparations for the dinner. Silently Shamus walked toward the dock to which the *Maski* was tied.

Aboard he went quickly to the poop deck where he stood for a moment looking down at the Dresden china vase with its hibiscus and lemon blooms. Then he went to his refrigerator, opened it, looked along the backs of a row of books stacked in it, and finally selected *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius*. Coming back to the table he opened the book at random, started to lay it down thus open, then paused and smiled as his eye lit

on one of his favorite sentences—a sentence which he had underlined with pencil long ago: *Fret not thyself at things, for they care naught about it.* He must remember that, for circumstances—time, place, condition of being, plans and vows—these were all “things” in the sense that the wise Roman had used the word. To accept them, that was the trick; not to fight against them, to live out your life in the way that cosmic forces make possible. And to let others follow their chosen paths without putting foot spears in them, or raising clouds of dust to make progress more difficult. . . .

He let his fingers run gently over the flowers in the vase, then carefully selected a hibiscus bloom and one from a sprig of lemon with a fragrant leaf attached, spread them out carefully between the pages of the book, closed it gently, pressing it together, and put the book back into the refrigerator. He smiled wryly to himself as he closed the door of the ancient and somewhat futile device. Pressing flowers in a book like a seventeen-year-old school girl! So be it. He had come almost within fingertip contact with a rare and elusive beauty. Perhaps he could thus keep a little of it.

He called Tulare. “I’m going down to my cabin, Tulare,” he said slowly. “When I am out of sight I want you to throw out those flowers in the vase. Wash the inside of the vase very clean and take it back to the Tauberina. I think you’ll find her at the convent. Tell her that we sail with the tide at daybreak. Tell her I have said that the vase and the flowers are very beautiful and that I am deeply grateful. Say also that I thank her for taking care of me while I was sick, and that I shall not forget. Can you remember all that?”

Tulare’s head bobbed up and down in solemn assurance. “I remember, Taubada. I go. I say.” He did not smile, and there was a deep warmth in his eyes, and a deeper curiosity which intimated that he knew there were things which had not been said, which were not to be said, and that this was rather a pity.

The rest of the day crawled slowly for Shamus, and so restless was he that he reached the dining-room before his host had arrived. He saw at once that Father Kirshner had gone to great pains, for the little palm-thatched room was festooned with flowers as if for a banquet. The long refectory table, roughly

hewn from native woods, was similarly bedecked with red hibiscus buds and lilies, a crockery set of colored Bavarian china, and some fragile blue-green glassware, slender and beautiful.

Counting the places, Shamus perceived with a start of hope that the table was set for four. With Brother Arden away, that could mean only one thing—that the places were to be filled with Father Kirshner, Sister Alicia, Sister Ganice, and himself. He found the deduction going to his head like wine, dizzying him, and he started toward the door. He must have a moment in the air, a moment in which to compose himself before he met her. Then he heard light steps outside and, like one who had made illegal entry and was about to be discovered, he moved quickly to one corner of the room and stood motionless in the shadow as the door opened and a woman came in.

Except for the huge white starched hood which hid her face, she was dressed in a nun's habit of coarse gray material. Her arms were filled with more tropical flowers to add to the lavish display which already bedecked the room. She failed to see him immediately, and at first kept her back to him so that he could not see her face, as she moved swiftly to the table and began arranging the flowers, humming softly to herself an old French folk tune. Then some sense must have warned her of his presence, for she turned swiftly and looked at him with a startled gasp.

Shamus gasped too, and found no words. The face beneath the hood was that of a young girl, and, as Father Kirshner had said, an extremely beautiful young girl. There were those violet-gray eyes and the thin lips of incredible sensitivity. He could feel again the tenderness of her hands as they had quieted him in his delirium. But now the recreation of that feeling did not quiet him. A warm possessive tumult surged within him, drowning all thought of the resolve which he had reaffirmed every day since his talk with Father Kirshner. As though his feeling had wordlessly been communicated to her, her face began to flush a deep scarlet. Lowering her eyes, she dropped him a quick flustered little curtsy, to which Shamus found himself responding with a low bow and a murmured, "Good evening."

She did not answer, but hurriedly lay the rest of the flowers loosely on the table and started for the door, looking steadfastly

at the floor. Shamus was there ahead of her, to open it for her. But before his hand touched the knob he felt words rushing from him, as his imminent departure seemed suddenly to rise up before him in menace.

"Not yet," he pleaded. "One little moment—please. This—this could be terribly important."

She did not answer him, but she stopped and stood before the door, not looking at him, and suddenly it occurred to him that of course she had not understood a word that he had said. An Alsatian, she would speak either French or German—possibly both—but, naturally, not English. Emboldened by the thought that he could speak without the meaning of his words being clear to her, he rushed on.

"You came to me when I was all but dead and in the terror of delirium and you gave me peace and strength. I thought that I must have imagined it—that you were a vision—perhaps even my mother come to save me; and here you are, real, and the most beautiful thing I have seen in my life. I—I wish I had words to tell of my secret thoughts of you, but what can I say—what can I speak of—?" He broke off helplessly, looking at her.

She lifted her eyes and there was in them almost a twinkle of laughter, shining like a beam of light from the dark depths of feeling which lay behind them.

"The *Maski* and the tide, Mr. O'Thaymus," she said in very precise English. "*Nicht wahr?*" Her voice was low and warm, in keeping with the expression of extraordinary sweetness that underlay the calm untroubled serenity of her eyes.

"So you speak English." What a stupid remark, he thought. God, how stupidly it is possible to state the obvious!

"A little I learn in school," she answered, smiling. Then her face became serious and she looked directly into his eyes as she continued. "But there are words I have never learn to speak or to understand if they are spoken. So—I may go now, please." It was a statement, not a question, and yet she was pleading, too, pleading not only with her words, but her eyes, her firm gentle lips, which seemed equally ready to break into laughter or quivering grief. She was asking him to help her not to feel what she feared she might feel if he stayed longer, asking him to take himself away quickly and not to say, now or ever, the things

which her whole being cried out to have him say.

How magnificently direct she was! And how fantastic the whole situation. It was as though love had come full blown to them, without any of the preliminaries through which lovers find their way to each other, and as though she, as well as he, had accepted it as a simple fact which needed no discussion—and yet which must be sternly denied by both of them.

"But you will be at dinner?" he asked. "There are four places."

She shook her head. "Brother Arden returned an hour ago. He will be here. It is better so." And before he could speak again she had opened the door and gone swiftly through it, closing it behind her.

For a moment Shamus stood where she had left him, trying to find some repose within himself, trying to strengthen his resolve. He felt as if suddenly the curtain had rung down on an event of great dramatic importance in his life. Then his fist clenched. No, by God, he wouldn't do it! If ever life had offered two people the chance of happiness and beauty it was in this moment which he, like a fool, was letting slip from him. What right had a fifteen-year-old girl to take vows which would bind her for the rest of her life? What right had the Church to accept them, or having accepted them, expect her to keep them at twenty? To bury her alive here in this savage land, away from all possibility of living the human life of a woman! It was a preposterous idea! "Goodness and honesty and human kindness—those are good things." It was only the other day that Father Kirshner himself had said that. What goodness, what honesty, what human kindness, was there in leaving Ganice here to this life which her vows had brought upon her?

Swiftly, impulsively, angrily, he reached for the door knob. He would go after her, tell her now, be as direct as she had been, urge her to let him take her away with him, from this form of living death. Then he stopped, his hand poised in the air, as he heard footsteps. The door opened, and there was Father Kirshner. But his customary cyclonic entrance failed to follow, for he had a little old lady on his arm, an ancient, tiny antique of a lady. She was dressed in a gray nun's habit and white starched hood identical with that worn by Sister Ganice, and although so frail and delicate in appearance, her bearing had a



sort of sprightly regality about it that reminded Shamus of an eggshell porcelain vase he had once seen, embossed with a likeness of the last Manchu Empress.

Gently the great man led her to a chair before presenting her: "Ah, my dear old fellow!" he boomed. "I see you're here first—you must be hungry. Allow me to present to you Sister Alicia. She's doing you the honor to dine with us, which is more than she does for most people. And this is Brother Arden—"

The sallow, austere face of the man indicated remained expressionless as he clicked his heels and bowed stiffly. Shamus, without caring, had the feeling he regarded him with suspicion and disapproval. "Now then, let's be seated. I've some fine wine of the Rhine I've been hanging on to for just such an occasion."

Shamus scarcely saw or heard. Throughout the dinner the repose and beauty of Ganice's face, which might have gazed down from the stained-glass window of an ancient church, kept floating before his vision and he hardly spoke at all. And her calmness and gentleness seemed to be urging him to still the rebellious tumult that was in his heart. Yet, as the dinner progressed, while Shamus was glad that he had not followed his impulse to dash after her and urge her to leave with him at once, he felt that he could not leave at all without first having told Father Kirshner how he felt, and throwing himself upon the good priest's mercy.

Luckily no one seemed to notice Shamus's silence, for Father Kirshner was in top conversational form and kept up a lively and humorous discourse on mission problems. Ordinarily Shamus would have found the conversation stimulating, but now he felt a sense of relief when at last Sister Alicia announced that she felt tired, and, although she didn't look it, bade him a chipper good night and left, assisted by Brother Arden.

Shamus lit the cigar which Father Kirshner gave him, and, as if by silent consent, the two men left the low building and began to walk along the beach in the bright tropical moonlight. Now he would speak, Shamus thought. But at each step the words which he wanted to say seemed to recede farther from him, and it was the missionary who at last broke their silence, suddenly bursting forth with an abruptness and fury that betokened the vigor of a vital mind in conflict, plunging into the midst of a

subject which had obviously been troubling him, without preliminary or introduction or explanation of why he was thinking of it just then.

"Nothing irritates me more than the theory that it is our duty to live for others," he said. "All my life people have written at me, preached at me, telling me that I should forget myself and live for others, and that that's the only way I'll ever find true happiness. What a lot of nonsense! Unless I'm utterly mistaken about God I believe that when he put me into this world he meant my happiness to be the thing of most vital importance to me, and my right to seek it not only a right but a duty. No one can show me any convincing evidence that God, the God who made the sea, who made you—and Ganice—who made a blade of grass and little Pilu, is capable of becoming revengeful, and sulky, and malicious—or even of feeling that there was any reason for his being so—if any of you seek to fulfill your own conception of happiness."

He paused, and puffed furiously on his cigar, and suddenly seemed to be glaring at Shamus through the night.

"People talk about the parable of Original Sin, and of retribution falling upon us through Adam and Eve. But they get it all wrong. In the first place it's only an ancient parable, and in my opinion a very childish one, and in the second, it concerned virtue and sin, and not man's right to seek his ideal of happiness. They fail to see that it isn't an act itself, but the meaning and content of the act, its results within one's self and others, which makes it good or bad, sin or virtue. You might ask me what I'm doing here—trying to help others, to be sure, seemingly in direct contradiction to all that I've just said. But it's no paradox. The answer is very simple. I'm happy here. If I weren't you may be sure I wouldn't be here."

For a moment he was silent, and Shamus made no comment, and then the great priest, seemingly but not actually changing the subject without transition, hurried on.

"You will remember what I told you about Sister Ganice," he said, and his voice seemed gentler as he mentioned her name. "She's young. She's as innocent and pure as a freshly opened flower. But she is not without a certain knowledge won through the grossly horrible experience which her father forced on her.

That induced in her a terror from which she escaped in embracing the peace of which her habit is a symbol. She has achieved one of the most difficult of all tasks: she has built spiritual beauty and a depth and breadth of character upon a brutal and degrading experience—

"I'm talking frankly to you, Shamus. There is no sense, between us, in evasion or pretense. I have watched you. I have seen Ganice's eyes when we have spoken of you. I know how she could grace a love relationship—and a marriage—and what it might mean to her; and though it may be heresy even to think of the possibility of a sister renouncing her vows for love, I am capable of doubting my own decision that she has chosen wisely, and feeling the force of the tremendous human arguments which must be troubling your mind. I shall tell you frankly that if either you or Ganice were to ask me what you ought to do, I would throw the decision back into your faces, feeling before God incapable of making it for you. Only of this am I sure—that no real man would dare touch anything so beautiful and fine as Ganice, any beauty won at the cost of such pain as hers, unless he were sure beyond the possibility of any doubt that he would not detract from that dearly won beauty and peace."

He paused, and Shamus did not speak. For a few paces the two men walked on in silence, while the moon made a golden path on the water to the wet and shining sand at their feet. Father Kirshner put his hand under Shamus's arm in a gesture of affectionate comradeship.

"Sister Ganice has been very happy here," he said softly, almost as if he were speaking to himself.

Still Shamus did not speak, and in a moment Father Kirshner dropped his hand from the young man's arm.

"Still leaving in the morning, Shamus?" he asked at last.

For a moment the tortured young man did not answer, and then he turned and faced the priest, seeing the intensity of the deep black eyes full on him in the bright moonlight.

"Yes, Father," he said at last, in a low voice, "I sail with the tide." It was the first time the term "Father" had achieved true meaning as he had used it with his friend, but just then it seemed the only word possible.

Before dawn next morning, Shamus was aboard the *Maski*.

But Tulare had wakened before him and routed out his crew to welcome the master. All was ready for departure. Determined to keep his thoughts strictly on the details of sailing, Shamus hurried aft to stow in his own quarters the small amount of duffel which he carried with him from his room in the mission. He started to lay on the table a book which he had carried in his hand, and then he stared in surprise, for in the dim gray light of the early morning he saw the outlines of the Dresden china vase, filled with flowers. Was he seeing visions again? He stretched out his hand and touched it, then whirled angrily on Tulare.

"I thought I told you to take it back to the Tauberina!"

Tulare straightened up, taken aback by the sudden fury in his master's voice. "Even as you said, master. That I did. I destroy the flowers. I wash the vase. I say to the Tauberina that the deep of your heart is thankful for the beauty and the care while you are sick and that you do not forget. The young Tauberina say nothing. Only her eyes say keep. But I come away and leave the vase with her. Last night while you eat she come back. The vase is fill with flowers as before. She come on board and put it there. She say, 'Tie down, Tulare, so that it does not run away again.' So I do that. See?"

He pointed to the base of the vase, and even in the halflight Shamus could see how skillfully Tulare had lashed it to the slats of the table so that it would stay upright when the ship was under sail. He was glad that it was not yet full daylight. He would not have wanted Tulare or any other human being to see his face just then, for suddenly, overpoweringly, he knew that he wanted to weep.

The *Maski* sailed on the flood of the tide. And as she threaded a cautious way out of the maze of channels leading to the open sea Shamus scanned the palm-sprinkled shoreline through his telescope for a last glimpse of the mission.

Already the little settlement was busily astir. Water buffaloes plodded along between the rows of coconuts, drawing heavy-timbered carts piled high with fallen nuts, ripe for splitting; laborers dug and hoed the base of the tall palms, others stripped the covers from the huge trays of drying copra in preparation for the morning sun. Just as it had been every morning since he

arrived.

Father Kirshner was not to be seen, but outside the little palm-thatched chapel with the white cross on the roof, he spotted two slim figures in nuns' habits standing together, watching the ship's departure.

In the gray light of the early dawn, pale beams from the sun's first rays gleamed strangely on the fabric of the white starched hoods. He could almost make out her face. On an impulse he raised his arm and waved. Through the glass he saw her start and peer forward eagerly. Then she waved back.

Ganice.

### *Chapter Six: IN QUEST OF HEAD HUNTERS*

RABAU, by those who know this sultry port, is designated by more than one vulgar phrase, not one of which is complimentary. The harbor, as well as the town, has quite a few skeletons in its closet, or rather, rattling along its reefy bottom. Skeletons in the most literal sense, for it was here that the epic devilry of the Blackbirder, Bully Hayes, reached its nadir of bestiality. Finding his schooner, with sixteen blackbirded slaves aboard, being overhauled by an Australian government frigate, so the legend goes, this ingenious gentleman, sooner than be caught red, or rather blackhanded, with the goods, tied a slave to each of the sixteen fathoms of his anchor chain, suddenly hove to, and bawled, "Leggo anchor!" And to the bottom of the bay slid the luckless sixteen. Calmly, Captain Hayes waited for the frigate to haul alongside. "What Kanakas?" he inquired, with mild indignation. "Search my ship? Naturally—I insist on it."

Shamus never entered the harbor without thinking of its unsavory reputation, and on this trip he was more conscious of it than ever, for it was all of a piece with what he had determined to leave behind him, and accented in his mind by contrast with the exquisite nobility and beauty of Ganice—so briefly presented to him only to be snatched away. During every waking moment of his voyage from Father Kirshner's mission to Rabaul, the thought of her had been with him, and strangely the strengthening conviction of her complete desirability had tended to resolve the conflict between his wanting so terribly to stay near her and

his resolve to return to England. For, feeling that he could never have her, her gentleness and loveliness, the peace of her being, had created in him an overpowering nostalgia for the gentleness and peace of his childhood home. Instinctively he knew that if he stayed in the South Seas he would forever be trying to achieve his desire—against all of Ganice's vows to the Church, against his own loyalty to Father Kirshner, against all reason. But if he could return to England and there re-establish a civilized way of gracious living, he would be able to achieve some of those things for which Ganice stood for him, and thus find a measure of peace. Here his very need for her was partly a need to escape from savagery, much less the savagery of natives like Anitok and his band than that symbolized by the white man Bully Hayes.

On making port, Shamus repaired immediately to Ah Chee's hotel in Chinatown. He would spend the night there, he decided, and get his shore legs before proceeding to the office of Burns Philp and Company to announce his decision and begin making preparations to sail to England. Besides, he had decided that he would get mildly drunk and thus find release, for a little while, from his thoughts.

By no means beautiful to behold, Ah Chee's was fairly clean, and in those days a robust institution. The discovery of gold had brought the scum of the earth scurrying from every far corner of the globe. It was a large, wooden, square building, with an enormous red roof and whitewashed hall, at one end of which lay the very heart and nerve center of the hotel—the bar. Here, if you wished, or whether you wished it or not, you met the guests—planters, prospectors, thieves, miners, recruiters, and others. Beachcombers, too, formed a solid percentage of the clientele—gentlemen usually distinguishable by a noble carriage and haughty demeanor.

If you missed getting to know everyone on the ground floor, you very soon made his acquaintance upstairs on the second floor, for the rooms were rooms in name only. Since they were merely partitioned cubicles, you could, by the simple expedient of stretching your neck, peer over the thumbtacked section of red calico which separated you from your neighbor and observe his every movement. In view of the additional fact that no such

things as doors existed, it will be readily perceived that acquaintanceship might ripen as rapidly as a tropic fruit.

In this madhouse there were never less than six phonographs simultaneously playing different tunes, and the resulting indescribable sounds were heard continuously night and day; the roar of rough men's laughter, an assorted medley of bottles clinking against bottle, dog fights every few minutes, poker chips falling. The general pandemonium was something like a mining saloon of the old Yukon days transplanted to the tropics. It was quite a simple matter to go mad in it.

Checking in was also simple. It was unnecessary to go through the formality of registering or consulting the proprietor; sooner or later you met him at the bar. You merely walked upstairs and along the corridor until you came to an unoccupied cubicle.

Following this procedure, Shamus, swinging the walking-stick which added to his rather comical air of grave authority, and followed at a respectful distance by Giuna, one of Gather Kirshner's Kanakas whom Shamus had selected for cabin boy, to carry his handbag, came upon an odd and unusual sight—a curtain stretched across one of the doorways.

He paused and stared at it in surprise. What naïve individual, he wondered, knew so little of Ah Chee's that he vainly thought to insure himself privacy by any such frail device?

Smiling, he pulled the curtain aside and poked his head inside. Instantly a large body of water doused him from head to foot.

"I thought I'd get you this time, you snooping louse!" said an angry female voice with a strange accent. "And the *next* guy that comes in gets whacked over the head with the bucket as well!"

"I—I beg your pardon!" gasped Shamus. Soaking wet, he was still half blinded by the deluge.

"Okay—scram!"

As he shook the water out of his eyes, he gasped again. Standing before him, naked except for a towel with which she covered as much of herself as possible, was a strikingly beautiful young white woman. She was glaring at him out of aquamarine blue eyes, the left one arched high in haughty fury, the other a dangerous slit. Suddenly a cascade of golden blond hair escaped from the loosely pinned-up mass on top and fell over her face.

It was pushed back in place, tempestuously—at peril to the towel, rescued just in time. As will sometimes happen in moments of stress, his gaze focused and held fascinated upon a most inconsequential thing—a tiny mole, high up on her left breast.

“Go on!” she repeated with a threatening stamp of her foot. “Scram!”

Shamus came to. Bewildered, flabbergasted, he backed out on top of Giuna and beat a hurried retreat, leaving a trail of water down the corridor. Trying to bypass the bar he was discovered and several loud, derisive shouts arose in his rear: “What ho, number three! How far did you get, mate?” Still dripping, he had himself rowed out to the *Maski*, diving in and swimming the last 50 yards to avoid comment on his soaking clothes among the crew.

It was a hot night, but he ordered dinner, canned sausages, a baked potato, and a bottle of German beer served in his quarters on the poop deck. Before leaving the ship earlier in the day he had set out the Dresden china vase (which, during the voyage, had been safely packed away) and had intended to bring flowers back to put into it when he returned in the morning. But in his hurried retreat from Ah Chee’s he had forgotten, and now it confronted him reproachfully, a beautiful thing in itself, and symbol of the greatest beauty he had ever seen.

As the steward brought his dinner, a certain expression which he caught on the Kanaka’s face told him that Giuna had lost no time in telling the story of the encounter at the hotel—probably with many Kanaka embellishments, he thought angrily. He settled down grimly to the sausages and baked potato, his eyes on the empty vase, his thoughts a strange mixture.

As has been mentioned before, the white female form is an extremely rare sight in Polynesia, even when clothed. Twice now, in a few weeks, Shamus had been unexpectedly confronted by it, and thus had been doubly shocked into a realization of a certain emptiness and frustration in the life which he was leading. As he had drawn the curtain aside in Ah Chee’s he had been thinking of Ganice, and the sight of the woman, nude and beautiful, at her bath had burst upon those thoughts like an exotic and beautiful wild creature trampling the quiet loveliness of a well-tended flower garden. For in strict honesty he was



forced to admit that the face above the towel had been, in its undisciplined way, as beautiful as the face of Ganice—not a face to be loved in the same way as was Ganice's, to be sure, but one to stir the predatory emotions of a man, one to excite, rather than to pacify him, especially when below it was an exquisite body separated from him only by a few feet of space and the frail barrier of a towel.

He had only partially understood what she said; most of the words could easily have been in a foreign tongue, so different was her accent from that which he had been accustomed to. But her meaning had been clear enough, and the spirit which accompanied it. A white woman, a woman who showed clearly in an instant that she was acquainted with ways of gracious living, yet for all that one whose spirit was clearly as untamed as that of a South Seas savage. The first impression which she created was the very opposite, in many ways, of that which Ganice had made. Yet he knew instantly that, had it not been for his complete preoccupation with the thought and vision of Ganice, that flaming vision he had seen through the doorway of one of Ah Chee's rooms would have upset his peace of mind disastrously.

How on earth was one to account for the presence of such an incredible creature in a place like Ah Chee's? Or any spot in Polynesia, for that matter? Here, to be sure, was no planter's wife, pale and sallow from the tropics. She was too young and vital, too vibrant to have lived long in a land which quickly saps and enervates. What, he wondered, would be the correct thing to say or do if he happened to meet her again, an awkward but quite probable contingency, Rabaul being a very small town. "How do you do—how different you look—"?

Following his own conception of protocol, he sat under the awning on the poop deck and wrote several punctilious versions of a note of apology.

*On board Aux. Schooner MASKI*

*Madam: I assure you I had no conception, when I made my unwarranted intrusion upon your privacy today, that your room was even occupied—let alone by a lady. Please accept my most humble apologies.*

*Yr. obedient servant,  
Shamus O'Thames.*

Then he found himself in a bit of a dilemma. There had been other invasions—how, then, would she know from whom the letter came? He added an explanatory note to the signature: (*I'm the one preceding the one you whacked with the bucket.*)

Rereading the letter, the general impression failed to please him. Nevertheless he sealed it with red wax, stamped the *Maski's* seal on it, and sent it off to Ah Chee's by Tulare, bidding him to see it fell only into the hands he described. As an afterthought he told Tulare to bring back some flowers to put in the Dresden china vase. Then he undressed, wrapped his print lava-lava loosely around him, and dismissed the matter from mind, climbing into his hammock to read himself to sleep with Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*.

The humid morning found Shamus astir early. As he sat down to breakfast he saw that Tulare had fulfilled at least the last half of his mission excellently. Some time during the night, while Shamus had been sleeping, the boy had come to the poop deck and skillfully arranged his bouquet of flowers in the vase. Shamus's heart leaped with a warm painful pleasure as he saw that, with tact and ingenuity, he had even got the right flowers—scarlet hibiscus and lemon bloom. Immediately the girl at the hotel was forgotten, and his mind and heart filled with Ganice, and self-pity because everything he did was taking him farther from her. Shamus gathered up his ship's papers, left the *Maski*, and presented himself at the offices of his agents and chief creditors, Burns Philp and Company.

In acquainting Mr. Gibson, the manager, with the details of the *Maski's* last trading venture, he was telling him nothing he didn't already know when he concluded that he was afraid it had been a dismal financial failure.

Mr. Gibson drummed an angular finger on his desk. He said that word had reached him of Shamus's illness. "Lucky you are that you lived through it," he said. Although it was too bad Shamus hadn't been a bit luckier in the way of trade or labor recruiting. Native labor was bringing such high prices per head, a steady twenty pounds all through 1930 in fact, for workers on the goldfields, that the recruiting business had become a veritable gold mine in itself. What about a recruiting trip? As for credit, Shamus need have no concern. All necessary trade goods and

equipment his company would gladly supply.

Shamus listened with half his attention, the rest of him back on the coast of New Guinea, walking along the beach with Father Kirshner, listening while the good priest was saying, "Why, I have seen white men—and the laborers in the goldfields—hauled off like slaves, and worked in altitudes which they cannot stand until they die like flies—" No, even if he had not decided definitely to go back to England, he knew that now, after his own close brush with death and the healing goodness of Father Kirshner, he would have no part in the goldfield trade. He shook his head.

"No, thank you, Mr. Gibson. I've no objection to recruiting labor—but not for work in the goldfields. In the high altitudes of Morobe the poor devils of Kanakas die by the score of lung trouble." He preferred to have no part of the responsibility of sending men up there, he added.

Mr. Gibson started to protest, but Shamus went on.

"You have never been directly associated with working gold-field natives. I have. It's about the nearest thing to legalized murder I can think of. But as a matter of fact," he added off-handedly, "we needn't concern ourselves. I've decided to sell the *Maski*."

Mr. Gibson caught his glasses just in time. He was a tall, angular man, with an expression rather like a benevolent but overwrought camel, but in spite of his leanness he sweated a great deal. He had a grayish complexion, sunken cheeks, and a long thin nose. A pair of ill-adjusted pince-nez glasses took up a high percentage of his working hours: due to the sweat which ran in a constant trickle down his face, they plagued him by sliding off his nose at the least twitch of emotion.

"Really?" he said, leaning back in his chair and looking at Shamus. He clasped his hands and assumed a sad smile, like a patient dromedary who has found an oasis too late and too dry.

Privately, he was amazed. What nerve! Here was a young man who owed the firm of Burns Philp and Company so much it was doubtful if, in the event of a sale, the young man even owned the vessel's anchor. And he's got the gall, he thought indignantly, to imply that he, Gibson, lacked conscience about the scandalous conditions on the goldfields.

"There won't be much left for you, I'm afraid," he observed with a sepulchral smile. "If we sell."

"No, I don't suppose so," agreed Shamus, "but that doesn't matter. I've decided to leave the country."

"Leave the country!" echoed Mr. Gibson. His glasses almost shot off the end of his nose. He had been so long in New Guinea that people who departed always astonished him, as if spirited away by unknown forces to some mystical land. "Well, well," he murmured with a vague frown. "I wonder where you'll go."

A telephone on his desk interrupted further speculation with three short bursts of jangling sound. Mr. Gibson picked it up. "One moment, O'Thames," he excused himself. "Hello? Yes. Ah, good morning, good morning, Mr. Swartz. How fortunate you should phone me. Yes. Yes, indeed. You recall the ship I spoke of? She made port yesterday and the captain is here in my office this very minute. Yes, a good idea. Please do, Mr. Swartz. I was just about to mention it to him. Yes, fine. Please do. Good-by."

Smiling cadaverously he hung up and began rubbing the tip of his long nose. "An odd thing," he said, "but here's a fine stroke of luck. This man, Swartz. He's an American and he's been after me to find him a good boat he can charter. The charter price will probably be a fancy one. As I said, he's an American—apparently very rich. He's coming over. I had rather counted on you for a labor-recruiting job, and had other plans for Mr. Swartz. But since you're a bit squeamish—well, I did tell him quite a lot about you and the *Maski* and he was interested. It's a great opportunity."

"Oh?" Shamus had never met an American, and although it was hard to tell whether responsibility for the faint note of awe in Mr. Gibson's tone lay with Swartz's wealth or his nationality, the prospect did not greatly excite him either way. "What concern is it of mine since I'm selling the *Maski*? Unless he wants to buy and find another master." Then, as an afterthought: "Where does he want to go?"

Mr. Gibson gave a damp shrug. "I'm not quite sure. But wherever it is, he's in a hurry—naturally. I've never met an American yet who wasn't in a hurry. Anyway, he needs a reliable man with a good boat. I think—" He frowned again and

after a pause looked at Shamus uncomfortably. "As a matter of fact I—er—he says he wants to go and photograph head hunters."

"Photograph head hunters!" repeated Shamus. If Mr. Gibson had said "grow feathers on frogs" he could hardly have been more surprised. "I'll be damned! What for?"

"Ah, what for, indeed." Mr. Gibson gave a philosophical shrug as if to indicate that for him life had few surprises left. "It seems he's a motion-picture expert, or some such thing, and requires an authentic background for something—he told me but I've forgotten. Anyway, whatever it is—" He made an irritable swipe at a copra bug crawling across his desk. This was no way to conduct a business discussion. "Well, you know—Americans—" he muttered in a lame attempt to clear the matter up—"strange people."

Shamus smiled ruefully. "He should have been with me on my last trip. He'd have had plenty of head hunters. I don't know how I didn't get a bellyful of holes."

"Yes, very lucky," agreed Mr. Gibson. "Now there's one bad—" He stopped abruptly. Young O'Thames didn't seem too enthusiastic as it was, and hadn't yet been told the worst.

"Something bad, you were saying?"

"Well, not exactly bad, no," went on Mr. Gibson quickly. "Inconvenient. You see, the man—well, he insists upon going up the Sepik River."

He glanced quickly at Shamus's face and was puzzled at the expression that he saw there, for he had regretted having brought that up just then, feeling that if anything would strengthen Shamus's determination not to go it would be news that the trip was headed for this most undesirable of all places in New Guinea. But what he saw had looked surprisingly like a fleeting surge of eagerness across the youthful features of the *Maski's* captain. And though it was quickly suppressed and replaced by an expressionless mask, Mr. Gibson felt, in a confused way, that he had unexplainably gained a little ground in the argument.

What had happened to Shamus was that his close knowledge of the coastline of New Guinea had made a simple deduction inescapable. To go to the mouth of the Sepik it would be necessary to sail along the coast within a few miles of Father Kirsh-

ner's mission and Ganice. It would be the simplest of matters to put in there for repairs or provisions—for a day, a night, a week. But he put the thought out of his mind as quickly as he could. He had made his decision. It was a good decision, a right one, the only one possible to him. He must carry through with it.

Mr. Gibson was floundering on in his argument, not quite sure now what line to take in order to get Shamus's consent.

"Nothing I could say would dissuade him. I began telling him what a foul, fever-infested hole the place is, and what treacherous and murderous brutes the natives are. But he seemed only delighted. I forget what it was he said—anyway, something very peculiar. Damnation—I wish I could remember. Well, anyway, the important—"

Shamus's face became stern. He must, he told himself, convince not only Mr. Gibson but also Shamus O'Thames that the whole idea was impractical, preposterous, or he would find himself seizing the opportunity to go back to Ganice with the eagerness of a schoolboy newly in love.

"Did you tell him that people who've been there come back calling it the 'Septic'?" Shamus shook his head. "Thanks all the same. If I were to make another trip that's about the last place I'd care to go. I was chased out of there once myself, if you recall."

At this point, Mr. Gibson suddenly sat up, and a curious contortion of his features took place. The skin on his long camel's nose wrinkled, drawing his lips up and baring his teeth. Shamus watched fascinated. The man looked as if he were about to bray. Unexpectedly, however, a thin reed-like sound issued—Mr. Gibson's laughter.

"I've just recalled what it was this Swartz said," he piped. "He said, 'Hot Mama! Just the babies I want!' Meaning head hunters. That's it—I've been trying to remember it all day—Hot Mama! Americans—weird, eh?" He peered across at Shamus to make sure the weirdness had not been lost on him. "Well, anyway," he continued as his features recomposed themselves, "he will pay twenty-five pounds a day—he, of course, to provision, victual, and pay for oil. The voyage might take you a couple of months, so you can see how well you'll do."

"Yes, I suppose so." Shamus felt himself weakening. "But I'll

not do it!" he almost barked. "I tell you positively, nothing doing. I'm selling the *Maski*."

Beyond a slight raising of his eyebrows Mr. Gibson seemed not to have heard the outburst. His voice was calm and had the smooth precision of a well-formed icicle as he answered, "You owe us, if I recollect correctly, somewhere in the neighborhood of a thousand pounds. Not," he went on, in the deprecating tone of a man who held as lofty a contempt for money as anyone, "that I mention this to influence your decision in any way. I merely wanted to point out that this one charter should put you financially in the black again. And besides, would it be necessary to go very *far* up the Sepik? In fact," he lowered his voice confidentially, "why go up that particular river at all? All rivers look the same, especially if you haven't seen them before. And there's not a tremendous difference in the appearance of the natives either. Strangers would never know. You could choose any safe river and—"

A sudden small commotion at the other end of the office caused Mr. Gibson to look around. He broke off abruptly and unfurled himself hurriedly.

"Ah, Mr. Swartz," he called, advancing with outstretched hand. "How nice to see you! Do come in."

Whatever Shamus had expected an American to look like, he was hardly prepared for the sight of the gentleman who now bustled in, breathing heavily and wiping off a pair of sun glasses with a large red-spotted handkerchief.

Short in stature, the outsize pair of khaki shorts draping his legs flopped amiably around as he walked. They merged eventually but without finality into another khaki area, presumably a shirt. It was not easy to tell, for his person was almost obscured by so great an assortment of leather-cased camera equipment that it seemed remarkable he could even walk. Topping off the ensemble was a vast khaki pith helmet, of the type worn by Englishmen to shoot tigers in, beneath which there popped a pair of very pale, prominent, but jovial brown eyes. He wore an eager beam on his face and exuded an aura of good fellowship.

"Hi, boys!" he waved his hand in greeting to the entire assembly of half-caste clerks, taking in Mr. Gibson, Shamus, and everyone else in the gesture. Then he marched straight over and

shocked Shamus to the very core, not only by slapping him heartily on the shoulder, but by addressing him without an introduction. "So, you're the guy, huh? Swell. Heard a lot about you. Sure glad you're going to haul us." He spoke with staccato rapidity, letting each sentence trail off at the end.

"Captain O'Thames—Mr. Swartz," brayed Mr. Gibson.

Shamus began a rather stiff bow. But Mr. Swartz never let it get properly under way. Seizing his hand he pumped it heartily up and down. "Captain, I'm glad to meet you!" he cried with ringing enthusiasm.

Shamus, who had frozen, responded in the manner of the hidalgo: "Thank you, sir," he said with distant gravity. "But I may as well tell you at the outset that I'm not going to 'haul' you, as you put it."

The extreme coolness of the reception would have chilled most people, but on Mr. Swartz it seemed completely lost. He smiled, kindly and confidently.

"Come now, Cap," he said, "I'm not gonna take that for an answer. Mr. Gibson has told me all about you—including you're kind of shy and how sometimes you have to be urged—" Shamus glared at Gibson, but the latter was busy examining papers on his desk and seemed not to have heard. "But from all he's told me you're the man I want, and the *Maski's* the ship I want. And I'm paying top price you know. So you'll just have to consider that you've been sufficiently urged right now and we'll make a deal. How soon would you say we could leave?"

The man's assurance was incredible. By every measurement of Shamus's mind he should dislike this blustering American completely. But, strangely, he found himself liking him. There was something about his good nature, his seeming ability to take life in his stride gayly, which swept across the deep and turbulent conflict which had swayed Shamus's soul ever since he had first seen Ganice. It was telling him not to take life so seriously, to come out into the sunshine, that nothing could be as difficult as it seemed. And, after all, wasn't there truth in that? Why should it seem so important to him that he leave at once? Surely a little longer would do no one any damage. To have one more look at Ganice, to hear her voice again—perhaps to touch her hand—and then sail back to England and make the memory



last him a lifetime— Still, he must be careful. He must think it through once more. He must not let this rotund dynamo rush him into it.

"Well, of course, Mr.—"

"Ah, let's cut out the formality, why don't we, huh?" Mr. Swartz interrupted, beaming at him with considerable warmth. "Just call me Doc. Now listen, Cap'n—I've got everything ready. I can move the minute you say the word. And if it's okay with you, I'd like to get going right away. How's about it?"

Shamus turned to Mr. Gibson, who still appeared to have his attention and his nose absorbed by some papers on the desk. "I just happened to be glancing through your account, Captain," he murmured. "It comes to slightly more than the sum we mentioned."

"Oh?"

"Yes. And by the way, I feel I ought to point out to you that even were you to dispose of the *Maski*, it might take quite some time to effect a sale. We might scare up a prospect while you're on this trip. Meanwhile our account *is* overdue, isn't it?" He made an apologetic gesture.

"Of course." With a faint smile Shamus turned back to Mr. Swartz. "I'll think it over. But if I do go, there are a number of difficulties. In the first place, special permission would have to be obtained from the Governor, Sir Charles Autrey—the Sepik River Kanakas are about the worst in New Guinea, so the whole district is designated 'Uncontrolled Territory.'"

"Forget it." Mr. Swartz beamed and patted his breast pocket. "The permit's right here. Sir Charles and me are pals. I had a letter to him."

"Oh," said Shamus. "Apart from that, it always takes several days to get clearance papers from the—"

"From the Harbor Master? Forget *that*. I had a letter to him too, and we're also pals. He'll clear you in an hour. Now, anything else we ought to take care of?"

"Certainly there is. The question of provisioning for instance."

"Once more—forget it! Took care of all that already. There's eight big cases of stuff all inspected and passed by the Customs, packed and ready to stow. By the time you get back they'll be lying on the wharf right by your boat, Cap'n. How's about to-

morrow morning?"

Shamus looked at him with a tinge of irritation. How many more letters did he have? "Impossible," he said shortly. Although it was hard to resent Mr. Swartz's amiability, he was aware of being high-pressured.

Mr. Swartz, however, was prepared to be reasonable. If the Captain didn't want to be hurried, he said, why, then, let him take all the time he wanted. "How's about tomorrow afternoon?" he concluded.

"Out of the question," replied Shamus. "I need several days to overhaul." He looked Mr. Swartz in the eye, added distinctly, "I'll let you know when I can sail—if I decide to go," and rose abruptly.

"Well, it's only a question of time, then. Otherwise everything's fine—fine!"

Mr. Gibson rose quickly, relieved at having carried his major issue. "And of course payments and all such details can be left to me, as agent for the *Maski*. Will you let me know your sailing time just as soon as possible, Captain, so I can notify Mr. Swartz?"

Suddenly Shamus gave up. He was beaten and he knew it—not by Mr. Gibson's argument about his debt, nor even the dynamic persuasiveness of Mr. Swartz, but by his own desire. He indicated his consent and Mr. Gibson nodded with a satisfied smile.

"Now would you gentlemen care to join me in a drink? A little something to er—celebrate. You know? *Bon voyage?* My house is just two minutes from here."

"No, thanks, Gibson," said Mr. Swartz briskly. "Got too much to do. Got to get my stuff together and a whole lot of other things." He turned to Shamus and bent the full force of his amiability on him in a beaming smile, ruining the effect, however, by another slap on the shoulder. "Great, Cap. I know we'll have a swell trip. Be seeing you." He bustled off, waving a genial farewell to the room.

Mr. Gibson looked disappointed. He always liked to take home a guest or so for an evening gin and tonic, having found that it prevented his wife, whose liver had not withstood the tropics any too well, from talking to him.

*Chapter Seven: WOMAN ABOARD*

WITH a mixed feeling of disappointment in himself for having acted against his better judgment, and tumultuous eagerness at the thought that he might see Ganice again, Shamus set to work briskly, so that by the afternoon of the next day the *Maski* was ready for sea.

As she lay alongside the wharf awaiting her charter, Shamus sat on the poop railing supervising the filling of the fresh-water tanks. Again he thought of the marked cordiality encountered that morning at the various government departments visited for his sailing papers. Also remarkable was the dispatch with which his business had been concluded. Mr. Swartz's letters must possess a rare potency, he decided. It was strange. In a land where a sort of internecine rivalry exists between bureaucrats to see who can take the longest time, he had found all his papers signed and waiting for him. As for Mr. Swartz, Shamus thought of him with amused detachment. It was hard not to respond to the little man's friendliness, even though one felt it was turned on like a tap, with careful calculation as to the results meant to be attained.

At tea time he spotted a long line of carriers approaching the Matupi Road from the township. The natives were staggering under heavy burdens carried on stout bamboo poles, and, following, trundled several native carts piled high with luggage and packing cases. It must be his party. If so, it was going to mean a lot more work, uncovering hatches and more stowing. All those cases—bringing along enough stuff to found a colony, he thought irritably.

A number of white-clad figures in the procession, he could count at least three or four, would mean passengers—more than he had counted on. Well—they could doss down any place they could find; he wasn't going to give up his bunk, that was sure.

Mr. Swartz, even more leather-festooned now and sweating profusely, could be seen bustling along in front, shepherding one of the carts. Shamus rose and started off down the wharf to meet him. He had only taken a few steps when he got the first jolt. The figure swinging along close behind Swartz he had sup-

posed to be a man—she was the girl of Ah Chee's.

She was garbed now in a pair of tight-fitting, deceiving, blue jeans, a purse about the size of a Chinese lawyer's briefcase tucked under an arm. As she strode down the wharf, her honey-blond hair blowing loosely in the breeze, head held high and arrogantly, she looked as if she were forcing her way against a stiff head wind and could make it if it blew twice as hard.

Shamus's first instinct was to make an immediate move in the opposite direction, back to the ship or somewhere. For some inexplicable reason, surprise or natural self-consciousness, he was suffused by a sudden impulse to avoid her. But it was too late now; Mr. Swartz was halfway along the wharf.

Beaming and mopping his face he came up. "Morning, Cap!" he breezed. "What a walk! This isn't my kind of heat, I'm afraid. Wanted to get down earlier, but it wasn't possible. Had to send some cables. Well—we're all here and ready to go. Captain—" he turned to the girl and taking her arm drew her forward—"allow me to present—Miss Cleo Charnel."

At another time Shamus might have caught the slightly dramatic implication in the announcement, as if Mr. Swartz would have liked to add, *Who of course needs no introduction*. But now he bowed stiffly with a murmured, "A pleasure, Madam."

"Hello." The girl nodded a casual and friendly acknowledgment. Then she pointed at Shamus's knees and observed to no one in particular, "Look, he's wearing shorts. Why didn't I wear mine?" She walked to the side of the wharf, inhaled deeply of the sea air, and looked down at the *Maski*. "Is *that* the tub?" she added wonderingly. "Good God!"

Mr. Swartz indicated a tall, razor-faced individual, with a worried expression and lank, white hair, from whose knobbly knees, below his unpressed shorts, more lank white hair limply sprouted. "Like to have you know Mr. Whitey O'Donnel," he said.

Shamus bowed to the man, who nodded back with a smile, exposing a set of teeth that looked like a half-finished game of dominoes, and turned away to resume counting the packing-cases.

"And Mr. Jimmy Dodds, my second cameraman." Shamus bowed again to a small red-haired man, and Mr. Swartz com-

pleted the introductions by pointing to a long-necked, pale, and slender youth whose most prominent feature was a truly magnificent Adam's-apple that reminded Shamus of illustrations he had seen of a boa constrictor who had just devoured a heavy meal. Somehow he had remained hidden till then. "This is Jodo Wilkins," he said.

The boy, who wore thick-lensed spectacles and looked about fifteen or sixteen, bent upon Shamus one quick look through his heavy lenses of such power and penetration that Shamus hastily revised his estimate of the other's age. Then the boy said, "Hi," in a flat and supercilious tone, plunged his hands in his pockets, and looked bored.

"Got a dark room on the boat?" The man named Dodds nudged him on the arm and shot the question curtly. He was small and disheveled, and his shock of close-cropped red hair stood straight up on his head like a brush. He was smiling through clenched teeth like a man who had just come from a savage but successful scuffle in a dark alley.

"A dark room?"

"Yeah, to do my developing." In spite of his smile his voice sounded harsh and irritable.

"Oh." Shamus smiled back. Any one of his holds, he replied politely, ought to be dark enough for the purpose. Perhaps he could contrive some kind of curtain that would help.

"Okeydoke," said the man in the same grating voice so curiously at variance with his smile.

Something about the man's expression caused Shamus to look at him more closely, and he suddenly perceived that the brownish yellow eyes were not co-ordinated. One shifted around quickly, but the other remained fixed in a baleful stare. Glass, he realized with a slight shock. And almost simultaneously he perceived that what he had taken to be a smile was in reality a sort of grimace, a facial affliction of some kind. It twisted the left side of his upper lip into a kind of smiling snarl. It also had the effect of making it almost impossible to resist smiling back at him. Feeling somewhat foolish, Shamus readjusted his expression. To cover his embarrassment, he quickly launched into a formal address of welcome.

As the speech progressed, precisely worded and delivered with

extreme punctilio, his listeners began looking at each other in astonishment. Again it was the manner of the hidalgo, the Spanish grandee, bidding his guests welcome to the castle. Even the interest of the boy Jodo, leaning against a packing-case, picking his nose and squinting obliquely at Shamus under one lens, seemed to be captured.

"Therefore," Shamus concluded with a flourish, "while I have little in the way of convenience, and few comforts to offer you aboard my ship, gentlemen, rest assured that everything possible shall be done for your welfare. I am very happy to have you aboard." With that he bowed, and a lengthy pause followed.

Still no one seemed to know how to reply. The boy Jodo frowned and turned away, uttering a noncommittal sound like a grunt. Shamus, puzzled by the awkward silence, and conscious that the girl was examining him curiously, began feeling uncomfortable himself. A slight frown had replaced her expression of bright interest. Now, suddenly, she began to laugh. Slowly at first, then with a mounting amusement.

"Of course it's you!" she announced airily, pointing at him. "I thought I knew you—how are you, Charlie?"

"Who?" Mr. Swartz looked mystified. "You two know each other?"

"Do we know each other! I'll say we do! He's seen quite a lot of me, haven't you, Charlie?"

Her voice fitted her very well. It was gay with a sort of lilting laugh hidden in it. It rippled, Shamus thought, like a cool breeze that dances lightly along a beach. Nevertheless, the sound made him feel ill at ease and he tried to retreat behind words.

"I beg your pardon," he mumbled stiffly.

She laughed again, arched an eyebrow at the others, and waved a langorous hand in his direction. "See what I mean? Charlie Bowtie. Who else could it be? You'd never think he was a peeker, would you? Your little note was very sweet, though."

Suddenly and warmly she melted in his direction. "It was from you, wasn't it? Sweet—I've been caught with my pants down before, but I never got a letter like it was from the British Ambassador about it."

At this astounding statement Shamus could do no more than stare. As the girl looked at him, another small frown, of in-

credulity, appeared on her brow.

"My land!" she said. "The boy's blushing! Look!"

To Shamus's intense annoyance everyone turned and stared at him.

Suddenly she turned away and with the same brisk cheerfulness peered down at the *Maski's* deck. "What a funny-looking thing," she observed again. "Well, let's start moving, boys. I want to see what my bed's like. And please, *please*, be careful of my trunks. Here—give me that little one, it's my make-up. If anything happens to *that*—"

The group broke up, and, dumfounded, Shamus watched her take the little black case from one of the native carriers and fondle it preciously.

"Had no idea you'd met Cleo." Mr. Swartz paused with a suitcase under each arm and nodded amiably.

Shamus looked at him blankly. "The young lady?" he said. "Surely—surely, you don't propose to take *her*, do you?"

"Cleo? Sure."

"To the Sepik?"

"Sure—why not?"

Shamus gulped and then indicated Jodo. "And the—child, too?"

At these words the youth, seemingly lost in bored abstraction, started as if stung. He swung around and eyed Shamus malignantly. Striding forward he faced him and tapped him with two fingers high up on the chest.

"You can't mean me, can you?" he inquired in grating tones. "Listen, Sinbad—I forgot more'n you'll ever know, so get wise to yourself."

"Now, Jodo!" Mr. Swartz spoke sharply.

"Yes, remember your manners, darling."

The girl was smiling at him with a sort of quizzical amusement, but the burlesque of her reproof wasn't lost on him. Clearing his throat, he addressed himself to Mr. Swartz in a firm voice: "Mr. Swartz, I am afraid there are no accommodations for ladies aboard my vessel."

The statement obviously surprised everyone. Mr. Swartz started to say something, but the girl broke in.

"Don't worry, Charlie. I've got along in plenty of funny

places." She had taken out a compact and threw the words from behind a large pink powder puff.

"Sure—put Cleo out in the middle of the Mojave Desert and she'd come up with a case of gin." Mr. Swartz uttered a short and rather nervous laugh. "She can handle herself, Captain," he added quickly. "Don't worry."

Shamus made a slight incline of his head. Now his face wore its usual expression of grave repose. "Possibly," he acknowledged. "But perhaps you didn't understand what I meant. I meant that I am reluctant to accept the responsibility of this lady's passage. The discomforts of a small vessel are more than discomforts, they are hardship. It's bad enough for men—"

"That's okay—what's good for the boys is good for the girls, I always say," the girl interrupted again coolly. She paused and added with a touch of asperity, "Now don't be difficult, Captain. I've never got in anyone's hair yet."

Without attempting to penetrate the subtlety of this sally, Shamus went straight on, addressing himself to Mr. Swartz: "Obviously you have no conception of the crude conditions which exist aboard a small trading vessel such as the *Maski*. I've never carried a lady passenger. For instance, there is no such thing as privacy. The lady would not even be able to wash herself. Properly, I mean. Our supply of fresh water is limited—"

She giggled. "Don't you wash?"

"Certainly I do," said Shamus stiffly. "Under a deck-rigged water bag or by jumping over the side."

"Okay," she said with a conciliatory smile and a wave of her hand, "I'll do the same."

"Perhaps you don't realize I have a Kanaka crew." Shamus turned back to Mr. Swartz. "There are quite a number of other things I haven't mentioned, but it all boils down to this—I have no cabin for this lady on my boat."

Again the pause lengthened. Then the girl walked over, slowly, until she was looking him right in the eye. She arched an eyebrow up at him, disdainful and patronizing. "How do you know," she inquired distinctly, "I won't be using yours?"

It was certain Shamus didn't know, so with a haughty smile she turned away. "Whitey!" she called imperiously. "Be a nice guy and see all my things get on the boat, will you?" Humming



a little tune she pushed by, shooting him a look of cool defiance, and marched down the narrow gangplank.

In spite of himself he couldn't help following her progress, obliquely. There was an irresistible fascination to the graceful harmony of her walk. Although a fluid homily in arrogance, its slender grace, like the swaying of a lily in rhythmic breeze, was still a strut. Ill-mannered, he decided; arrogant and wilful. And she was on board. And she would probably be using his cabin.

Behind him there came a short laugh. He turned quickly. The boy Jodo was looking at him with an expression of amused contempt. The boy said nothing, but produced a package of cigarettes and lit one, without removing his sardonic stare.

Uncomfortably Shamus turned away. His eyes ran down the long piles of luggage and packing-cases, stretching all the way down the wharf.

For a brief moment he considered the possibilities of canceling the charter. Cooped up on a small boat, this party was going to present a thousand problems. Especially the young woman. Already he could imagine the innumerable feminine demands she would unquestioningly make on all hands. But it was too late now. He was committed.

Abruptly he turned and called his bosun who was standing near by. "Tulare!" Then he walked across to Mr. Swartz. "I'm starting to load your stuff, sir. Would you have the kindness to indicate which of your boxes you would like kept accessible? This is Tulare, my bosun. He's in charge of stowing."

"Certainly—glad to," Mr. Swartz answered quickly, relieved that the issue appeared to be settled. "We won't need much—"

"Huh! If you're smart you'll keep *all* the dame's stuff accessible, Mac," drawled the boy behind him. "She changes her clothes ten times a day."

"Thank you." Shamus looked at him but could think of a no more adequate response.

"Oh, Captain—one moment." Mr. Swartz took Shamus's arm and drew him aside. "Look, Cap," he said, in a friendly, apologetic tone. "I guess I should have mentioned it at first, but honestly I had no idea you'd feel this way about women passengers. You see, Cleo's got to come along. So has Jodo, because my picture is all about the two of them. I'm in a peculiar busi-

ness—we have to do some peculiar things. It's my responsibility to photograph both of them against certain backgrounds. You know—tropics, palm trees, lagoons, natives, and so on. That's what I'm here for. I've got to make it fit the story—Cleo plays a society girl, cast adrift in the tropics, Jodo is supp—”

“Is her kid brother.”

Unaware that the boy had followed, both turned. He was standing close behind them, hands in pockets, the cigarette drooping loosely from his mouth. Even the thin wisp of smoke that issued from it seemed heavy with a weary cynicism. “In the original script I was her son.” He uttered another short laugh. “But she took care of that. Now I'm her kid brother. Dames!” he added cryptically, and slouched away.

Mr. Swartz watched him. “That boy's getting worse every day,” he murmured as if to himself. “Hams are born, I guess, not made—unlike actresses.” The aphorism seemed to please him and he added a short laugh. “Anyhow, as I was saying, I thought that since I'd hired the boat I could more or less—”

“Of course,” said Shamus, responding to the little man's honest concern. “You have every right to bring whomever you wish. It's merely that—well—a charter like this is somewhat out of my line. But since you've made your arrangements, please give it no further thought. The young lady shall have my cabin.”

As he walked off to supervise the loading, a thin sing-song voice, obviously intended to reach his ears, intoned satirically, “Oh, boy—is this going to be gay? I'll say. Yes—it's going to be gay—I'll say. . . .”

The sun went down. Night fell with the startling suddenness of a land which knows no twilight. Lights twinkled, dancing across the waters of the harbor.

The last of the cargo stowed below, Shamus dismissed the Kanaka stevedores who had come from Rabaul. Weary and damp with sweat he was about to strip and hop over the side for his evening swim when Cleo emerged from the shadows.

“Hi, Charlie,” she greeted him breezily. “What about a drink?” Trim, neat, and elegant, she was smiling up at him airily.

She had already changed her clothes, Shamus couldn't fail to note, recalling Jodo's words. Sporting a close-fitting gray skirt,

with a white silk blouse and flowing polka-dotted bowtie, she looked infinitely cool, infinitely casual. But her expression held no hint of anything but genuine friendliness.

Shamus's bow was jerky, devoid of its usual grave grace. For some reason no commonplace reply occurred to him, and, as the silence lengthened, his awkwardness increased, until suddenly he found himself assailed by such an overwhelming sense of inadequacy and shyness that the power of speech threatened to leave him entirely. This was ridiculous. Exasperated, he took a deep breath and rose to overcome it.

"Good evening, Madam!"

The three words sounded so much like a series of sharp explosions that the girl looked momentarily startled. She peered close into his face. "You're not still sore, are you? Or do you just dislike women? Or me?" She looked again, and, apparently reassured, went on with a bright and open smile. "How do you like my bowtie?"

Shamus glanced at the article politely and ambiguously, but refrained from comment.

"I thought I'd wear it especially for you. Say," she asked with sudden anxiety, "maybe—you don't really mind me calling you Charlie, do you? If you mind, I'll quit."

Her tone expressed such genuine anxiety that Shamus unbent a little. "Prav do so," he said, "if it pleases you."

"Thanks." She gave a puzzled little laugh. Cocking her head to one side she examined him again. "My land! Are you always like this?"

"Like what?"

"Nothing." British, she supposed. Whatever it was, she hated frigidity. This kind of thing could get a girl down if she let it. She straightened up her trim shoulders, gave the silver belt buckle around her waist a slight hitch, and looked up at the starlit sky. "Umm!" she exclaimed appreciatively. "What a night!"

Out in the wide hook-shaped bay a bright moon was climbing out of the water, glittering on the dark jungle slopes of the Mother and Daughters, as the three mountains behind Rabaul are named. Slight sounds, borne on the warm winds of the harbor, came over the water—native reed music, the grind of a

dock crane, the barking of dogs. . . .

Cleo gave another pleasurable little sigh. "Hell of a moon, isn't it?"

"Quite."

"Say, what's down there, where you just came out of?" She pointed to the hold

"Your luggage, Madam," replied Shamus, repressing a strong impulse to add *which took up half the ship's stowage space*.

The girl's eyes looked coolly into his, questioningly. "Listen, Charlie," she appealed earnestly, placing a hand on his arm. "I guess you don't want me along, do you? Well, maybe I don't like everything about it either. But as long as we're stuck with each other, we might as well be friends. Now if we're going to be friends, there's one thing you've got to do for me. You've got to stop calling me 'Madam.' There's something about that word—well, anyway, will you do that?"

"Certainly—as you wish."

"Swell." Giving his arm a little pat she clasped hands together, glancing around the ship eagerly. "You were going to tell me what's down there besides my trunks. Oh, never mind." Dismissing the matter she went on with repressed excitement. "Know something? Actually I've never been so thrilled since I was a kid as I am about this trip. When are we leaving?"

Until that moment Shamus had not intended sailing till the morning. But something, perhaps her enthusiasm, the bright youthful zest in her eyes, communicated itself and filled him with a sudden urge to be under way.

The night was fine and clear. Off shore a fair breeze was springing up, wafting with it the strong musty smell of drying copra. And fainter, there mingled with it the sweet, almost tangible one, of night-blooming frangipani. Ashore, all things went about their business. Dogs barked, answering each other across the bay; the steam crane hissed and puffed; a Kanaka's voice raised in song as he fished by the light of a flaming torch of dried coconut fronds; other voices too—Chinese, Japanese, and Kanaka, the whole strange medley of muffled night sounds mingled with the smells of a thriving South Seas port.

Turning abruptly he cupped his hands: "Girup deck diken-na!" he bellowed aft. "Come on—out! Raus!"

"What's that all about—what's it mean?"

"It means we're leaving."

As the woolly-headed boat's crew came tumbling on deck to the barked orders of the bosun, laughing and shouting jibes at each other, and he heard the other familiar and well-loved sounds of a ship preparing to set forth upon the sea, he felt his spirits begin to lift and glow in accord.

Shortly the *Maski* was plowing through the dark shadows of the harbor heads, heading out into the sparkling swells of the open sea beyond. Above, a nameless galaxy of stars studded the heavens. Aft, the lilting chorus of an ancient Kanaka chanty, handed down from sea-going ancestors, came to his ears, lustily chanted as the crew coiled and stowed the running gear. And as he felt the soft, salt spray borne on the warm wind across his face, once again Shamus became more than a man—he was a god.

"Say—about that drink? We've got rum, bourbon, scotch, gin. And champagne, but it's hot. Want to come and join us?"

The ardent beauty of the upturned face, moonlit, windswept, glowing with the dark mystery of shadows, counterpointed the innocuous words.

Shamus looked down. "Thank you," he said with his grave smile. "Extremely kind of you—"

They went aft to the poop deck, and there, before he did anything else, Shamus took Tulare's flowers out of the Dresden china vase, threw them, and the water they were in over the side, carefully wrapped the vase in an old flannel shirt which he had dedicated to the purpose, and put it safely away in that which had once been a refrigerator, while Cleo leaned against the rail smoking a cigarette, watching him with speculative eyes, and wondering.

### *Chapter Eight: WAILS FROM ALOFT*

THE *Maski* had been a week at sea, plowing a foamy way along the coast of the spindle-shaped island of New Britain.

To a high-flying gull's eye no more than a tiny speck upon the sea's face, to the man controlling her destinies she was becoming something in the nature of a hell ship, embarked upon

a voyage mal-inspired from the beginning. If Shamus had set sail with certain uneasy forebodings, each day brought happenings which more than justified them.

An entry, however, at this time in the private, not the official, ship's log, would shed little light on the true state of affairs: *AT SEA Nov. 15th, 1930. Off Gasmata Coast. Longitude 150° East; Latitude 06° 45' South. Raised Point Matapan, visibility hazy. The passenger O'Donnel obvious drug addict.*

The evidence had led him unmistakably to such a conclusion. At the completion of the very first meal on board, everyone was seated under the awning over the poop deck aft at the breakfast table, presided over by Shamus. It was a fine, sparkling morning, with the *Maski* skudding along smoothly and seemingly motionless in the light breeze and calm sea.

Over a cigarette and second cup of coffee O'Donnel was describing some incident that had befallen him in Rabaul. In the midst of his discourse he had casually laid his cigarette on the saucer, drunk some coffee, then reached in his trouser pocket and extracted a small metal case. Puzzled, Shamus watched him take out a hypodermic needle and piece it together. Still talking unconcernedly he filled the needle from a bottle and in plain sight of everyone jabbed himself violently in the leg—clear through his trousers! A slight grunt as the needle entered was the only interruption to the flow of his conversation.

Flabbergasted, Shamus only half listened as he watched him fit the needle back into its case, slip it into his trousers pocket, and from another pocket extract another bottle. He looked at the others—no one seemed in the least concerned. "So I said to this customs guy, are you going to give me my stuff, or what? What is this routine, anyway? A monkey's wedding, or what?" He had a habit of finishing most of his utterances with the query "or what?"

From the second bottle he now spilled three indigo-colored capsules in the palm of his hand and tossed them into his mouth, followed by a mouthful of coffee for a chaser. "Those customs guys! They're the same all over the world. Pure bastards. Do they think folks have nothing to do besides sit around and salaam, or what?"

He extracted yet another bottle, spilled some white powder

onto the back of his hand and sniffed it expertly into his nostrils. "They're as bad as cops, in my book," he concluded with a sigh of satisfaction.

The whole thing had a very ugly appearance. Shamus could think of no steps adequate to the situation. Obviously the others were inured to their friend's vice. However, things cleared up a few days later. For two whole days Jodo had failed to appear on deck.

"He's seasick, poor kid," explained Cleo when Shamus asked about him.

"Seasick, hell," said O'Donnel, out of her hearing. "He swiped some of my pills—that's what's the matter with him. My sleeping pills. He's so darn curious—wants to know everything. That'll teach him." He uttered what was for him a very hearty laugh. "Those pills are extra strong—have to be, for me—"

Shamus asked if the boy were liable to suffer any harm.

"No," said the other. "Nothing. He's just been passed out for two days. Beginning to wake up now, though. Personally, I think it's a pity. He has to wake up, I mean." He gave a satisfied laugh. "Know what he did to Cleo once? They had a scene to do. He was her son; she had to kinda clasp his head to her breast—you know? Well, he'd had an awful cold all week and we'd been hoping his nose would stop dripping. But each time they went into it she'd feel a stream dripping down her dress front. Each time it happened she'd stop and ask him how his cold was. 'Swell,' he'd say. 'All finished.' Well, she couldn't figure it out. But I could. He'd fill his mouth with water and let it dribble down her chest during the scene, so she'd think his nose was running. Is he a little son-of-a-bitch, or what?"

Shamus mutely agreed. "But these pills you take all the time—" he began hesitantly.

"The Seconol?" said Whitey. "Great stuff! I never miss a night—couldn't sleep a wink without 'em."

"But—the hypodermic. Excuse me for asking. . . ."

"Oh, the needle? That's for my diabetes. I have to take insulin. Whenever I feel weak, I give myself a shot. I used to boil the needle and go through a long hygiene routine. But that's all a lot of junk. Now I just shoot it in any old place—usually in the leg or the pratt, except it stings there for some reason. Yes, sir.

If I couldn't get insulin, I'd die of diabetes in a few hours. I suffer from colds too. But not any longer—got some new stuff in powder form. You just sniff it and you never get one. Like to try it?"

Shamus said that he would wait till he had a cold. "But those other pills—the ones you take after breakfast?"

"You mean the benzedrine? That's to wake me up. That's one bad feature of the sleeping pills—make you feel kinda groggy in the morning. So I take benzedrine to snap me out of it. Then in the middle of the day I take milk of magnesia pills with a little milk. That's to rid my system of both sleeping pills *and* the benzedrine. Great system. It's been a life-saver to me. Don't know what I did before I got hep to it. Works wonders."

After that Shamus, relieved, but still amazed, revised his entry in the ship's log to read: *Re: drug addiction noted 15th passenger O'Donnel: This observation ill-considered—apparently diabetic.*

Most of all Shamus approved of Jimmy Dodds, the small, red-haired, taciturn man, with the glass eye and perverse smile, but even about him there was an air of disturbing unreality. Jimmy spoke but rarely and then with a wonderful economy of words. Most of his time seemed to be spent in a deep and profound study of some sort of brochure; probably mathematical tables of some sort, thought Shamus, after he had caught a quick look at long rows of names and numbers. And whenever they were sailing close enough to the shore to make it practical Jimmy set up his camera on the bow and ground out reel after reel of film, on which it was perfectly obvious there would appear nothing but shoreline, inlets, river mouths, etc. And whenever he did this he got Shamus to give him their exact position, and entered it with obvious care in a notebook. A crazy sort of movie Mr. Swartz was making, Shamus thought, but after all, he knew nothing of such things, and anyway it was Doc's affair, and Jimmy's.

One day Jimmy looked up from the brochure which had seemed to be mathematical tables and stared at Shamus with a faraway expression. Ruminatively he reached up to his face and slid out his glass eye. Breathing on it, he gave it a quick rubbing overhaul with a handkerchief and then, holding it between two fingers, pointed it at Shamus.

"That Phar Lap," he declared, "is the greatest horse alive.



He'll never be beat." Then he spat on the eye, gave it another rub, and held it up to the light, squinting at it with his twisted smile.

"No?" replied Shamus politely, absorbed in watching the operation.

"No," pronounced Jimmy emphatically. The discussion apparently at an end, he popped the eye neatly back into its socket and buried himself in further study. Shamus was able to read the cover: *THE FORM*, and underneath, *Australian Racing Association*.

"I'm certainly glad there's no race track up here," Mr. Swartz confided in a low voice. "When we get around a track I can never find him—he's always buried under five hundred racing forms. Has them sent to him from all over the world. Sometimes they're a year old, but he doesn't care. Horse racing—there's a strange disease for you."

"Does he ever win?"

"Never." Mr. Swartz shook his head. "That's why he likes to travel—so he can't bet. I think he won a parlay about ten years ago—in the Argentine. But he blew the money and he's never had a dime since. He must have bought annuities for half the bookies in California. They call him the 'Laughing Loser,' although I don't think anyone's ever heard him laugh. But this way he's happy. He carries around a whole file of old racing forms, see? He picks winners all day long in the Scratch Sheet and it doesn't cost him a dime. At night he looks them up in the Racing Results to see if they came in. If they lose, it drives him nuts—even if the race was run a year ago. Notice how sad he was yesterday? He must have taken an awful beating."

Shamus gazed with compassion upon this willing victim of life's delusions. The little red-headed man was now smiling wider than his usual twisted grin. A crafty gleam had crept into his good eye. The other one stared out blankly in another direction. As Shamus looked he bit his lower lip and turned over a page anxiously.

"Look at that," whispered Mr. Swartz. "He's just going to find out if he picked the winner of the Kentucky Derby—last year's."

Suddenly Jimmy laid the paper down, put the palms of his

hands together, and expelled a deep, controlled blast of air. He looked out to sea dejectedly.

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Swartz. "I guess he blew that one too."

Mr. Swartz drank a lot. Whenever he opened a fresh bottle of Old Grand-Dad whisky, a large supply of which he had brought with him, he rarely stopped until the bottle was empty. The strange part of it was one never caught him actually taking a drink. Throughout the day there would be occasional quick backward tilts of his head, followed by slight, throat-clearing coughs. Gradually the level inside the bottle would subside like the inevitable drop of the sand inside an hourglass. And he never got drunk—not markedly so. On the contrary, to the close observer his eye became brighter, his gate steadier, his smile more kindly, and his speech clearer, though somewhat circuitous. His choice of subjects for discussion, however, were apt to veer widely around the compass.

Shamus was standing forward by the rail one fine evening, gazing over the sea, lost in the beauty of the night.

"Why don't you jump?" a voice behind him said suddenly.

Turning, he saw the round and kindly face of Mr. Swartz, smiling at him benevolently. "Go ahead, son," he continued in a paternal, almost benign, tone, indicating the water. "Jump! Get it over with. What good's it going to do you if you wait? You'll only want to do it a year from now."

Shamus laughed. "For a moment," he said, "you sounded like the voice of Circe."

"Circe!" beamed Mr. Swartz with enthusiasm. "Ah, a man of education and perception! That's exactly what I am. I'm the Tempter—coaxing you to do what's good for yourself. Look!" His voice became one of persuasive logic. "What better time could you find than this? And what better place?" He gestured broadly over the sea. "The quiet seclusion of Neptune's broad halls. And it will all look very much like an accident—I won't say a word, I promise you. If you don't do it now, you're merely postponing it." He dropped his voice to a note of warning. "Conditions might not be so favorable later, pal. You might find yourself, for instance, wanting to jump off the roof of the Chrysler Building in New York. And then what? A mess—sloppy and unrecognizable—subject to the gaze of a morbid public."

Somewhat bewildered, Shamus observed that if he ever went to New York it would not be for the purpose of jumping off buildings. He was, he added gratuitously, quite happy.

This information seemed to depress Mr. Swartz. But after a moment he brightened up. "Don't worry," he said with a cheerful wave of the hand. "You'll do it some time. I suppose, Captain, that you consider me a defeatist. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I am a—" he paused and frowned, searching for the convincing phrase. "I am an optimistic humanitarian. I merely hate the sad spectacle of human beings, particularly friends, leading such stupid, miserable, lives, when they can so easily knock themselves off. In fact, in a not too distant future, I visualize some pretty general mass suicides—as the public becomes better educated. It all boils down to one simple question. Do you, or do you not, want to prolong the misery? So many things can happen. Your emotions might become embroiled in the fatuous delusion called love. Or you might run for Congress. You might even get married. Then what? Four thousand fighting lawyers fighting to get your wife a divorce. You know, I hope, that in these days of legal inequality between the sexes, there is a lawyer hidden behind every girdle? No, my boy, don't procrastinate. Jump! Get it over with!"

Shamus said he thought he'd let it just drag on awhile. "But, tell me," he asked, "aren't you ever tempted to follow your own advice?"

"No." Mr. Swartz shook his head. "But I've persuaded a couple of good friends to do so. I even went out and bought a gun for one of them. But that was more or less in the nature of a public service. You see, he was a sculptor, a very bad one, who lived in New York. Can you imagine what might have happened?"

Mr. Swartz lowered his voice earnestly. "Why the man might have polluted all of Central Park with his statues."

He paused a moment to allow the frightening significance to overwhelm Shamus. "As it happened, in trying to shoot himself, he bungled the job—missed and shot his ear off."

Mr. Swartz shook his head with a kindly smile and undertook to explain the reason underlying the debacle. "He had a narrow, rather imbecilic forehead, poor guy. Hardly a good target. So

after that they put him in an institution called the Medford Retreat—a wacky factory, where he should have been all the time.”

Again he lapsed into a brooding silence, staring out over the dark ocean. At length he heaved a deep sigh and turned back. “A similar fate,” he concluded abruptly, “can easily befall *you*. It’s damnably depressing.”

With a jovial nod and friendly pat on the back he turned and went aft, his gait chipper and sprightly.

For hours Shamus could see him slumped in his deck chair in the shadows, in an attitude of profound dejection. Dawn found him still there, fast asleep, a beatific smile on his face. When Shamus expressed the hope that morning found him in better spirits, he looked surprised.

“Me?” He beamed. “Never better, old man—never better.” It was apparent from his expression that he considered Shamus a little peculiar.

Shamus’s main worry was the general impact of the passengers upon his boat’s crew, unaccustomed to ebullient Americans. In ship’s discipline he took considerable pride. Painstakingly he had always trained the eight husky Kanakas of his crew to a wonderful efficiency and obedience, all the more remarkable since, in the confined quarters of a small South Seas trading lugger, it is not so simple to remain an aloof and separate being, remote yet at the same time closely joined in every minor ill or trouble of daily life. To be sure, these men were new to him, but five of them had been under the excellent discipline of Father Kirshner, and there was always Tulare, of whom Shamus thought much as he did of his own good right arm.

Only recently emerged from virtually a Stone-Age civilization, their fathers cannibals, these apparently docile Melanesians had of necessity condensed knowledge only absorbed by more advanced people by the passage of centuries. But while child-like and laughter-loving, beneath the surface the raw primitive existed, ready to emerge at a skin scratch. Shamus always handled them in accordance with a set of firm and clearly established rules. A flogging was a not unusual penalty for any serious infringement, a punishment the culprit would never consider unreasonable, for it is true, and all hands knew it, that in the formidable, uncharted waters of New Guinea, on such things

as instant obedience, the judgment of a split second, the very life of a ship depends, no less than in the days of the great navigators, Cook and Van Dieman.

There had been several instances in which the smooth routine of ship's discipline had seemed endangered, but Shamus had held his peace, hoping that he could avoid making an issue of it. But on the morning of the seventh day out, when he was up aloft in the cross-trees taking a bearing, he became aware of an unusual and disturbing emptiness on the deck 60 feet below.

The watches were always divided into three. Of the men on duty one stood by the engine, one by the helm, and one as forward lookout. Those off watch generally lolled around the deck at their own business, whittling in wood, chewing beetlenut, powdering lime in their wooly scalps, sleeping or trolling a fish line over the stern or both.

Now, however, from his perch up in the crow's-nest, Shamus looked down and could observe no such activities. More than that, he couldn't see a soul. The Americans would be under the poop-deck awning which also hid the helm, but the rest of the crew—where were they? And where—he looked again and could hardly believe his eyes—where was the forward lookout? The prow was deserted: an unprecedented, unforgivable thing.

He skinned down the ratlines, and on hitting the deck near the foc'sle, heard strange sounds issuing thence. Cocking an ear, he listened. There came a faint rattling noise. Next, the voice of the boy Jodo soloed forth, saying in wheedling tones, "Come, squares, come for papa. The big eleven!"

Mystified, Shamus opened the bulkhead door and walked in. The tableau on the foc'sle floor momentarily paralyzed him. Crouched in a wide circle, in the center of which were heaped several piles of silver and Australian pound notes and several other assorted objects, squatted not only Jodo, but Cleo, the man O'Donnell, and the rest of the ship's crew. And, to complete it, his missing forward lookout!

"What's this?" he barked.

At the sound of his voice it was as though a wave had suddenly surged up on a beach, engulfing it. The circle dissolved on the instant, leaving as pebbles Cleo, Whitey, and the boy Jodo, holding a pair of dice poised in mid-air.

"What's the idea?" Jodo demanded, the small piercing eyes behind his thick glasses gleaming irritably. "What's the idea breakin' up the game?"

Ignoring him, Shamus addressed himself directly to Whitey. "Mr. O'Donnel," he said frostily, "these are crew's quarters. I will appreciate it if you will have no dealings of any kind with the crew. They do not understand white people mingling with them—particularly the playing of games."

"The hell they don't!" interrupted Jodo. "That guy with the bone through his nose just made six straight passes. Why do you have to horn in, Sinbad? And on my dice?"

Shamus ignored this too, since he had no notion what the boy was talking about. But again he experienced a certain powerful urge the youth aroused in him—an almost irresistible impulse to kick him, regardless of his years. "It would be better if you were to remain in the after part of the ship. I'm sure you understand," he concluded to O'Donnel.

"Sure. You bet, Cap," said Whitey. "You don't think we want to break any rules, do you, or what?"

"What a gyp!" muttered Jodo darkly. "I thought we'd rented this boat, for God's sake."

"We did—but apparently we rented an old maid's home with it."

Nettled by the sarcasm, Shamus turned. Cleo had risen and was reclining languorously against a bulkhead powdering her nose.

Until now he had no opportunity to observe her costume. The sparse, one-piece, gayly-colored silken garment, was of the type that revealed by concealment. It clung, gossamer-like, skin-like, to the outline of her form. One long slender bare leg bore her weight. The other crossed it, forming the design of infinite superiority that seemed to be her special gift. With a patronizing little smile she put the big pink puff back in the compact and snapped it shut. "Come on, boys," she shrugged, "let's get back where we belong—before we infect the crew." With that she sauntered out on deck, followed by Whitey and Jodo.

It is true that in Shamus there existed a certain prim quality, certainly not prudery, but perhaps meticulousness, the result of early environment. Her progress along the deck was a burlesque

of his own walk, a provocative gesture of defiance, the comedy of which he might have appreciated ordinarily. But now as she strutted along, nose high up in the air, saluting to either side, he noted the effect upon the crew. Shaking with suppressed hilarity, each one's gaze nevertheless was fixed upon the exaggerated swaying of her nether portions—with unmistakable expressions.

A lesser man, or one of more discretion, might have avoided a showdown, at least for the moment. But not Shamus. Authority, ship's discipline, was at stake. All eyes watched him as he strode after her, a picture of stern, unflinching purpose. None suspected the sickly feeling within him.

Cleo was now leaning elegantly upon the rail on both elbows. She had produced her small compact again and was dabbing abstractedly at her nose, but eyeing Shamus's approach in the mirror. Mr. Swartz was seated in a deck chair and seemed to be reading. Whitey, seated by Jim, had begun a game of solitaire. Jodo, apparently engrossed by a pair of albatross following the vessel, had strategically placed himself where he could see and hear everything.

Shamus cleared his throat politely. "Please excuse me," he began. "This is a little awkward, I know. But would it also be possible for you to dress—I mean, do you think you might possibly wear something more conservative?"

"Why?" The surprise in her voice was not all affectation.

Shamus's mouth began to twitch at the left corner. He kept his eyes fixed on a point above her head. "I was hoping it wouldn't be necessary to explain—"

"It's not," she said sharply, a note of indignation in her tone. "I'll wear what I damn please."

"Now, wait a minute, honey," called Mr. Swartz quickly. "The Cap's got his reason and, if it's what I think, it's a good one. So why don't you go down and put on a pair of slacks?"

"The hell I will! Why? Just because he doesn't like my playsuit? Who does he think he is—Schiaparelli?"

"Please understand that this is no whim of mine," Shamus persevered. "The truth of it is that my boat's crew rarely see a white woman. When they do, such ladies are usually adequately clad."

There came a short cackle of laughter.

"He means," translated Jodo pithily, "the niggers can see too much of you, kid. Not that the rest of us—including Sinbad here—haven't seen more."

In the short silence that followed, Shamus was infuriated to feel himself beginning to go red. For one thing he detested the word "nigger," particularly when applied to his crew. Once, years before in Rabaul, he had coolly walloped a man on the nose for using it. The boy was leaning on the rail, his chin cupped in one hand, an expression of detached amusement on his face. It was quite apparent the situation pleased him, as well as Shamus's reaction to his remark. Shamus felt rise within him another violent surge of revulsion for the boy. He reminded him of some De la Mare character: ageless, sexless, supernaturally wise. . . .

"Shut up, Jodo!" Cleo's voice held a new, hard note that for a moment held Jodo transfixed. Then she turned back to Shamus. "I wonder if you realize," she said with challenging hauteur, "how little your boat's crew means to me? Or, for that matter, any man on this boat—as a man, that is. I'll wear what I please—how and when I want to."

No longer did artifice mask her feeling. She was angry.

Shamus's anger was of the cumulative type. The expression on his face remained stony but the blood started to leave it. Two small muscles against his cheekbone began pulsing and throbbing. When he spoke he grated the words in crushed ice. "Obviously you do not understand. On board ship it is sometimes necessary to give an order. I hope that it will not be necessary in this case." Turning abruptly, he strode off, followed by a derisive cackle from Jodo that nearly snapped the last links of his restraint.

Well, he thought grimly to himself, he supposed that this clash would destroy the last pretense of friendliness between them. So be it, if she wished it so. He refused to contemplate what he would do if Cleo persisted in ignoring his request. But an hour later, as he was walking aft he saw her leaning against the rail—demurely dressed in slacks and a lovely V-necked blouse which was feminine as the very devil and yet was what even old Burbidge would have called—well, decent. And the smile which she flung at him from mischievous eyes and lips



seemed genuinely friendly.

Shamus smiled back. "Thank you very much," he said, and meant it.

She arched her brows, raised her shoulders, and spread her hands in a gesture of helplessness, as if to say, *What can I do against a masterful man like you!*

So went the progress of Captain O'Thames's relationship with his passengers—and especially with Cleo. They were a puzzling lot to Shamus—all of them. But Cleo was the mystery of mysteries, a creature who could seem to him utterly hateful in one hour, and—he had to confess it—completely fascinating the next. The crew loved her. He often wondered how she managed to look so invariably trim and elegant with as few conveniences as the *Maski* boasted. He found Tulare had rigged up an ironing board for her in the galley, and was even ironing silky, frilly things himself.

With a light fair breeze and a following swell off the port quarter, Shamus couldn't complain of the *Maski's* progress. But due to the extra demands on the water supply, the result of Cleo's blithe refusal to permit any rationing of her toilet requirements, he had to stand in at various points along the coast to refill the tanks.

Sometimes, when he came back to the ship from shore, he brought back flowers with him—scarlet hibiscus and lemon blossoms, if he could find them—and then, if the sea was calm, he would bring out the Dresden china vase, and for a little while live silently in the emotions which the vase and the flowers provoked in him. More than once Cleo saw him arranging the flowers, and watched, from slightly narrowed eyes, his mask-like face as he did it. First she had grave suspicions. Then she wondered. But she said nothing.

One day, however, while idling on the poop deck, she walked over to the old refrigerator, and, out of sheer curiosity, opened the door. When she saw what was in it she started in surprise, then laughed.

"My God, look what's here! Any hot stuff in this literary ice box?" she asked.

Shamus came forward, annoyed at what he felt was an intrusion upon his privacy, just as she extracted *The Golden Book of*

*Marcus Aurelius*. As she held it in her hand it quite naturally fell open at the place where Shamus had inserted Ganice's hibiscus and lemon flowers.

"Ah," she said, "memories! Were they in that blue and white vase once?"

"Quite," Shamus smiled shortly. Taking the book from her hands, with an abruptness which might have seemed very rude had it been less justified, he put it into the refrigerator, closed the door firmly, and without another word strode away.

At one port of call, the small village of Kalabari, he brought back to the ship a large gay-plumaged parrot with a long tail and strident voice, and presented the bird to Jodo in the frail hope of conciliating him, perhaps even winning his regard.

The gift, while it failed in its intent, at least revealed to Shamus one thing heretofore unsuspected—he was capable of liking *something*. The parrot was instantly named Hedda; her beady eyes and raucous prattle, said Jodo, reminded him of a lady whom he knew back in Hollywood.

In an amazingly short time she was so tame she screeched nervously every moment Jodo left her sight. Apparently he possessed a natural gift with birds—or else the parrot was of an abnormally friendly disposition. But, in either event, Shamus soon cursed the day the ill-omened fowl joined the ship's company. For one morning she got loose in the chartroom, and, possibly inspired by some nesting urge, tore three of his most essential charts to shreds. Without duplicates he was forced to alter course and stand well out to sea to avoid coastal reefs. All this amused Jodo so much that Shamus suspected the thing might have been more than an accident.

One incident, however, nearly snapped the last frayed tatters of his patience with Jodo. It concerned the ship's cat, Hercules. Shamus was devoted to Hercules, not on account of any particular charm he possessed, but because of a certain dietary foible. Hercules liked cockroaches. He would eat other staples if he had to, even an occasional rat, but to him cockroaches were bread, the staff of life.

One fine evening the steady breeze from the North found the *Maski* scudding noiselessly along at a smooth clip. Aft, everyone was seated in deck chairs on the poop deck, enjoying coffee and

brandy and the quiet joy of perfect sailing conditions. A lovely night.

Dinner had been quite a pleasant affair; Cleo had been dressed considerably in a lovely print dress, the conversation between the Americans, turning upon their homeland and the town of Hollywood, had been lively and stimulating, if a trifle incredible. Later, Cleo began singing a few quaint little songs, accompanied by Jim on his guitar.

Hers was more than a nice voice, for she had a discerning talent which combined gayety with sentiment. And as the soft, lilting tones carried off and wove with the guitar a pattern of harmony in the cool night air, Shamus sat entranced. At first it but stimulated his dreaming of Ganice. He closed his eyes and lived again those moments when she had seemed almost attainable—that brief segment of time when they stood facing each other and it seemed as though words of love and desire trembled behind both their lips, and again the next morning when, boarding the *Maski*, he found that she had returned the vase and the flowers, as if to say that this much of her at least he must take with him.

What would he do when (and if!) he saw her on this voyage which he had undertaken for the very sake of seeing her? Would he keep his pledge? Or would he do that which his whole being urged him to do—pled with her, in every way he knew how, to come along with him?

He stirred restlessly, opened his eyes, and found himself watching Cleo as she leaned, back to the rail. Each time she took a breath the flowered silk dress stretched taut across her stomach, and her breasts strained, aggressively pointed and challenging. And as he looked she caught his eyes, and for a moment held them in the warm embrace of her own, in which there was a deep fire, eager brooding, and it seemed an invitation which coursed through his blood like wine and made his breath come hot and quick. He was so hungry, so damnably hungry for what it seemed was offered him. He remembered what Father Kirshner had said about the difficulties of keeping the vows of the Church. Well, vows, he was finding, were as difficult to keep whether they were made to the Church or to oneself!

He looked away impatiently. Yet even when he refused to

look at her, he felt her magnetism pulling at him as though it were a tangible force which if he did not use all his will against it, was capable of lifting him out of his chair and drawing him to her. How was it that Cleo could stir such thoughts in him, could make him feel this way, when his mind and heart were so filled with Ganice? For the first time in many months he thought of Weininger's *Sex and Character*, which only a few years before had been such a powerful influence in his life. Well, of one thing he was sure: Cleo was not the kind of a woman whom Weininger would have classified as the mother type. But what had that to do with the matter when a man felt such pent-up longings as he did? Stirred to a deep realization of his loneliness and need by the saint-like womanliness of Ganice, he suddenly realized that his emotions were raw and that he was wide open to the attractiveness of any attractive woman. Wasn't it natural that Cleo should stir him? It couldn't mean any more than that. It was Ganice that he really wanted. But he must watch himself. He must stop imagining. . . . He twisted about nervously in his chair, and decided that he would not think about it any longer. Then he scowled questioningly. What was that damned sound he kept hearing? Throughout dinner and reaching his ears now in vague dissonance to Cleo's songs, it seemed to him he could hear, every so often, a strange and dismal cry, sometimes faint, sometimes fairly distinct, issuing out of the evening heavens.

At first he put it down to the voice of some strange night bird flying around the ship, but it was too long drawn out, too dismal. But sea birds that fly in the night seldom sound a cry you would expect. Each time he strained his ears the sound ceased. Then again it would come, faint and lonely, never distinct enough to identify.

Suddenly the wind changed. Then there was no longer any doubt. Everyone stiffened as there came a piteous wail. Like a lost child in Limbo, ending in a tortured moan that died away mournfully in the distance, the cry came clearly.

Cleo broke off in the middle of her song, listening. Everyone listened. But again there was no sound except the soft cadence of the wind through the rigging and the gentle swoosh of waters as it gurgled along the ship's side.

"That couldn't have been my voice, could it?" Cleo said doubtfully. "Did you hear what I heard?"

"Yeah!" Whitey rose and followed Shamus to the rail. "I've been hearing it all evening. Weird. Is this boat haunted, or what?"

"Ah, it's just a boid," said Jodo. "I saw it."

"A bird?" Cleo peered out to sea. "What's it look like?"

"Well—it's kinda black, with a long tail." He dismissed the subject with a gesture.

From out of the sky the cry came again. A harrowing lament, this time weird and tragic, as if a tortured angel were shedding tears. It rose to a sudden spasm of harsh, envenomed hate, and then died away mournfully in the distance. A cold chill descended upon the group.

"Good God!" said Mr. Swartz and rushed to the rail.

Petrified, everyone else stood with frozen expressions staring out to sea.

Suddenly Whitey pointed up into the heavens. "Up there!" he said. "Look! On the kite!"

Necks craned out from under the poop-deck awning. A large box kite, attached by a line to the stern railing, was sailing in the sky astern. "Get a load of what's in it!" he yelled.

About the box kite itself there was nothing unusual. It often sailed there, night or day. In the churned-up foam of the ship's wake certain fish will not strike a bait. This was a contrivance to swing the lure into the undisturbed waters to either side.

Now, however, perched precariously within the kite and fastened to it, was the lean figure of the cat, Hercules, clearly silhouetted against the sky. A black, bizarre outline, he sent forth one more plea for succor—a blast of rage and hatred, execrable, wracked and vengeful.

"How on earth did he get up there? Jod—?"

"How else do you think? It's his idea of a gag on us."

When at last the unhappy animal was rescued, Shamus, controlling his feelings with difficulty, went to look for Jodo. Cleo followed. They found him standing with his back to the rail, firmly braced. He faced them defiantly.

"You cruel little devil!" Shamus barked angrily, advancing upon him. "That wretched cat's been aloft there for hours! I've

a mind to—”

“Take it easy, Mac!” warned Jodo in a low and ominous voice. With a loud and raucous noise he cleared his throat, filling his mouth with phlegm and pursing his lips with clear intimation that he was ready to discharge it in Shamus’s face. “You come a step closer to me and see what you get. . . .”

With infinite weariness and disgust Shamus turned on his heel and walked away.

### *Chapter Nine: THE DANCING PARROT*

AT DUSK, some days later, Shamus was sitting on the ship rail, idly observing Jodo and toying with some thoughts concerning him. He had avoided the young monstrosity as much as possible, and curbed his own impulses of active unfriendliness.

Unaware of his scrutiny, the boy was now occupied in pulling Hedda’s tail feathers. He had placed the parrot on the flat top of an upturned oil barrel and was apparently teaching her something, what it was Shamus had no idea. But as he watched the wretched fowl, feathers ruffled and looking like an outraged dowager faced by an intruder in the night, he felt more than ordinary compassion for the bird. Could he but compose a humble prayer in the knowledge that it would be granted, he told himself, he would ask nothing more than a week at sea with Jodo as cabin boy—alone. Not from any urge to harm the lad—merely the satisfaction of having him by himself for a while; an opportunity to examine his secret soul, while subjecting it to a taste of stiff ship’s discipline. A bit of bilge swabbing in the early dog watch for instance, a stretch of galley cleaning. . . .

Lost in reflection, he suddenly became aware that he was being examined in turn by Jodo. The boy had momentarily ceased aggravating the parrot and was staring at him sardonically, the familiar twisted, malevolent smile on his ferret face. Hurriedly Shamus looked away—he had the impression his inmost thoughts were being read.

Slowly Jodo arose and strolled over to him. Pinning him to the railing with the steady evil of his smile, he remarked: “Say, what you’ll bet me I can’t make my parrot dance? You know I’ve only had a little while—to teach her much.”

Shamus took a deep breath in order to make his voice sound casual. "Make her do what?"

"Dance—dance. You know what dancing is, don't you? Or don't you? I've taught her to waltz and she's learning the rumba. What'll you bet?"

"Well—what?"

"Five bucks—that's a pound in your money. Whaddya say?"

Shamus hesitated. His effort to control himself had put him in no mood for close relations with the lad—sporting or otherwise.

"Come on—I got five already with Whitey, five with Cleo, and I think old Swartz is going for ten."

"Very well. I suppose you can include me—"

"You're included," said Jodo promptly. "You're in—for a fin. You might win. Maybe Hedda won't feel in the mood tonight. That's the chance I take. Show starts at eight sharp—up by the mast. And, oh yeah." He frowned again and the harsh aggressive tone crept back into his voice. "There's a slight charge for admission—a buck—five shillings to you. Got the scratch with you?"

Shamus applauded again in chorus with the others. Remarkable, he thought as he watched the end of the show. The boy's true vocation was now revealed—he should have been an ornithologist, or a professional trainer of birds. His ability to make the parrot perform at a word was nothing short of amazing.

All hands, crew off watch included, were gathered around the foremast. Here a canvas windbreak had been erected to shield an empty oil barrel. Facing it were all the available deck chairs. All bets had been won and the money was already in the pocket of Jodo, who had lost no time in collecting.

On stage—the flat top of the upturned oil barrel—the dancing parrot had just finished a gratuitous encore of his extraordinary performance. At each word of command from Jodo, the ludicrous fowl would start a kind of polka step on the barrel top, flapping its wings and squawking raucously. When Jodo bade it cease, it hopped around a little but almost immediately settled down to preening its feathers. During the rounds of applause Jodo picked Hedda up and whispered soothingly.

Finally the ring of spectators broke up, still discussing the show.

"Wonderful!" Shamus exclaimed to Cleo. "Why, that bird only came out of the jungle a few days ago as wild as blazes, and already it can dance a jig!" With an incredulous smile he shook his head. "Somehow I can't visualize the little—that is, one would hardly suspect him of such a gift with birds, would you? Why, he ought to be able to teach it almost anything!"

"Correct!" replied Cleo with puzzled skepticism. "If I know Jodo, pretty soon it'll know how to pick pockets. It's a surprise to me too. I didn't think he liked birds, or anything. Or vice versa."

Shamus laughed. "It's a very nice quality to discover in him, anyhow. An understanding of animals, particularly such delicate creatures as birds, calls for a rare form of sensitivity."

"That's just what I can't understand—" she frowned—"knowing Jodo. I suppose down deep some good is hidden in everyone—way down deep, in his case. Oh, well—" She paused, gazing thoughtfully out to sea, and after a moment went through the motions of a very decorative little yawn. "Bedtime, I guess. Won't you come and have a nightcap?" The invitation was casual, accompanied by a deprecating smile of considerable charm, "I seem to be always suggesting nightcaps. But it's such a lovely night—to be going to bed—"

In the general enthusiasm aroused by the dancing parrot, the previous strain in their relations seemed to have been forgotten; and indeed in the narrow confines of the *Maski* both of them had found it difficult to sustain. But this was something more than a proffered olive branch. Now in her eyes he could detect no trace of the familiar haughty disdain. They looked back into his softly. The gentle breeze seized tiny wisps of her honey-blond hair and blew them out in golden streaks from the nape of the slender neck.

Whether it was the warm magic of the tropical night, the haunting beauty of her, Shamus felt overcome by a strange lassitude, a sudden breathlessness. He fought to repress it. "Thank you," he said stiffly. "Very kind of you. But we're not far from land. I'd best see to the lookouts—"

She slipped her arm through his. "Okay, I'll come with you,"



she said brightly. "Okay?" she repeated, as she felt him stiffen.

"Of course." It wasn't reluctance on his part, only another breathless surge at the touch of her bare skin.

Arm in arm they strolled forward. For a moment both were silent, and then Cleo, moving even closer to him, laid her free hand on his forearm and looked up at him.

"I've never really thanked you properly for giving me your cabin," she said in a low voice which was like a caress. "Sometimes I've looked at that miserable shakedown you made for yourself back there by that crazy old icebox and I've felt like a heel."

"I assure you I'm quite comfortable," Shamus said. He knew that his words sounded stiff and unfriendly, but he found it difficult to speak at all, for the blood was pounding in his throat, and he sought to control his breathing.

"There's only one thing wrong with the cabin you gave me," Cleo went on, demurely. "The bunk's so comfortable and so roomy and all—but, well, Captain, it's sometimes so lonesome down there all alone at night. You know what I mean—when a girl's so far away from home and mother and everything. . . ."

Shamus was glad that it was dark, for he was sure that he was blushing furiously. And his pulse was pounding so terribly that he dared not try to answer her. Was it possible that she meant what he thought she did? Could a woman come right out with an intimation like that? He caught a faint sound and knew instantly that it was merely another form of her taunting burlesque. Another man might have recognized it for a good sense of timing with ambiguity—to mask what is really meant with the cloak of laughter.

They were by the foremast now and, and suddenly a dark shape rose up and scuttled away, crouched over, toward the bow. As if escaping from imminent danger, Shamus instantly bounded after it.

He overtook the prowler by the foc'sle door, and, seizing a handful of woolly hair, hauled into the light a Kanaka named Taun, very frightened-looking indeed.

"Dina gao hida?" he asked. "What were you doing?" His voice was louder and more threatening than Taun had ever heard it before, shouting down his own confusion and desire

even more than it was making demands of the Kanaka. Reaching down he fiercely jerked an object out of the man's hand. It was a kerosene blowtorch for soldering and heating metal. "E dihu lau? In carhe do bin blowtorch ou?" Which is to demand, *Where are you going? What to do? And what work had this blowtorch to do?*

Even as he spoke, a reply became unnecessary—the whole picture was suddenly clear. "I'll be damned!" he said, amazed. "You hid inside the barrel, didn't you? And you heated the underside of the barrel top with that blowtorch when the young Taubada Jodo gave you some signal? So that the parrot either danced or had his feet fried? The truth now!" Ferociously he glared into the man's face to forestall any lies.

The trembling Kanaka nodded. "Oi, Taubada."

Shamus looked hard at him. "For saying what is true your punishment tomorrow will be the less. I will think about it. Perhaps you will be whipped. Now raus!" He gave the boy a hard shove.

Cleo had heard the confused jumble of words in amazement. "Heating the barrel!" she exclaimed. "Why, the dirty little crook! Can you beat that? And I went for it! I should have known!"

She reached out quickly and took Shamus's hand in both of hers. There was no sign in her words or tone that their conversation about sleeping quarters remained in the category of unfinished business. "You're not really going to have that poor man whipped, are you?" she asked in a voice warm and sympathetic. "He was just the goat. Jodo can make a goat of anybody."

Shamus shook his head, but he could not look directly at her. "Probably not, but he must be punished. Meanwhile, he's got something to shiver about tonight. Anticipation—you know—half the punishment."

He paused and thought for a moment. "The dance of the dancing parrot," he said and began chuckling. It was a relief to have something to chuckle about—make a noise—laugh—keep the conversation away from cabins.

"Hedda the Hep Kid!" Cleo began to laugh too, softly at first, and then louder and longer as the lugubrious picture of the toe-pointing bird recurred. Infected, both of them laughed uncontrollably, until the tears nearly came.

But as they laughed Shamus began to feel desire for her sweeping over him in an incredible wave of power. He felt drawn to her by an almost irresistible magnet, stirred with a deep need for her. He found himself trembling to take her in his arms and taste the delectable flavor of her laughter, as though it were a tangible thing which her lips could transmit to his own. And a darker, less controllable, more insistent need surged in him as there rose before his eyes the picture, which she herself had invoked to taunt him, of Cleo alone in the familiar surroundings of his cabin, sleeping in the bunk which had supported him through so many lonesome nights. He pictured himself coming in as he had so casually night after night for years—and finding her there. He would have only to go down the accustomed stairs of the companionway and walk in through the door whose lock had been broken for years. His blood rose in a thundering crescendo. By God! She would let him! That really was what she had meant, it must have been! No bucket of water to be thrown at him as in Ah Chee's, but only warmly welcoming bare arms! Should he ask her now, to make sure, or simply take it for granted? He wished that he knew how those things were done! He found himself trembling, and was aware that his laughter had died to a preposterous, phony chuckling which he tried to maintain for fear that she would know what he was thinking if he was altogether silent.

All at once Cleo stopped laughing. She leaned on the rail, cupped her chin in her hand, and examined him quizzically with one eye half shut. Was she going to charge him with his thoughts? He hoped so. It was only an opening he needed!

"Know something?" she said as if she had just made an important discovery. "I never heard you laugh before."

Immediately Shamus's mouth closed with a snap.

"Oh, don't stop! Please go on—you look wonderful when you laugh!"

He frowned and cleared his throat. Did one, he wondered, turn hilarity on and off like a tap? He hadn't the least intention of trying.

"I see. That's what's wrong with you!" She made a little clucking sound. "Among all your other complications you're one of the people who never really learned to laugh. Not prop-

erly, I mean. You smile, yes, but it's not the same. The other's so important! The mere physical thing of laughing loud. You're always so grave. Most of the time you look as if your grandmother just died!"

"Really?" said Shamus frostily.

"Sure. Laughter's actually a tonic—clears the bloodstream." She examined him. "I don't think you even know what I'm talking about, do you?"

"Certainly I do." Shamus looked down at her coolly. "Do I have to be a chicken to know what an egg looks like? I'm perfectly capable of laughing—when I'm amused."

From his tone Cleo realized that he was still prone to take offense, but before she could remedy anything Shamus continued in a faintly sardonic vein. "You know you shouldn't keep these discoveries to yourself. Whitey, for instance, I'm sure would be interested—it might do something for his bloodstream."

To conciliate him Cleo giggled. "Yes, can you see him taking his laughing pills? Or maybe stabbing himself with a needle in the fanny—and then immediately bursting into gales of laughter? Poor guy, the only time he's at all happy is when something happens to Jodo." Hoping she'd steered the conversation into less provocative channels she pointed ahead. "Is that land over there?"

Shamus nodded. Leaning on the rail they stared out over the dark sea in silence. Forward on the port quarter the black outlines of tall mountain ranges dropped down, merging in nebulous distance with the water's edge. Poor visibility, so it was hard to tell, but they should make a landfall at any moment, perhaps another hour or so. Subconsciously he braced himself for the unpleasant strain of taking his ship into an unfamiliar anchorage in the dark.

So he always looked as if his grandmother had just died, did he? Captain Ahab—was that the impression? What was he supposed to do then—go around howling his head off? Any time anyone dropped a fatuous remark?

"Oddly enough, my grandfather used to visit America—quite often," he announced suddenly.

After a brief hesitation, Cleo looked back upon the sea and said, "Really?" with polite interest. Puzzled, she was trying to

recall anything odd that might have cropped up apropos of America or Shamus's grandfather.

"He used to skipper a fine full-rigged ship in the eighties. From San Francisco with lumber to China. Then to Sydney for wool and back to Liverpool. Once he even made a voyage to Russia—quite an event in those days."

"I'll bet," murmured Cleo. She didn't want to sound too engrossed in Shamus's full-rigged grandfather, or whatever he was. She had a very feminine contempt for abstractions.

"And my grandmother sailed with him everywhere—for twenty-three years. A wonderful little old lady she must have been, don't you think? Twenty-three years on the one ship with the one man?"

"And how!" exclaimed Cleo, in spite of herself envisioning this phenomenon. "Twenty-three years! Didn't she—I mean, I was just thinking it's a wonder she didn't at least change ships once in a while."

"Yes. Anyway, a very funny thing happened to her—"

"What?"

"One night in a gale the ship ran aground off the Irish coast. Grandmother was lost overboard."

Gazing out over the sea Shamus seemed lost in reflection for a moment. "You can imagine what it meant to grandfather. He found her the following morning—floating in about three feet of water."

Cleo stared at him, round-eyed in the dark. For a moment the flat and startling suddenness of the denouement left her speechless.

"The wrong way up," added Shamus without looking at her.

"How terrible!" she managed at length in an awed voice. "Was she—she was dead?"

Shamus turned and gazed at her. "I hardly imagine," he replied gravely, "she'd have had a plausible reason for floating around upside down otherwise, do you think?"

Cleo studied him in silence for a long time before she reached a conclusion. "What are you trying to prove?" she snapped at last. "I suppose you think that's funny!"

"No, but I thought you might! After all, humor's a very relative thing—like laughter. By the way, have you ever read Otto

Weininger?"

"Never heard of him," Cleo answered a bit petulantly. "Who is he?"

"He was a man of great wisdom," Shamus said solemnly, "of very great wisdom indeed. Yet all of his wisdom could be condensed into the single word: *don't*."

"You're a pretty crazy bastard, I think," Cleo said thoughtfully, "but—"

"Ste-e-board! Ste-e-board!"

The sharp cry came from aloft and the ship heeled violently as she swung hard over. There was much fast scampering of bare feet around the deck.

"Steade-e-e!" Again the cry cut the night air.

The boat swerved and then straightened up.

Shamus cupped his hands and shouted aloft. "Belong wha' name?"

"Reef, Taubada." The answer came down, relief in it.

"Half speed! Stand by lead line!" He cast a swift glance astern, straining his eyes along the wake. "Amazing how Kanakas can spot a reef even at night, isn't it?" he remarked.

His voice was calm, almost casual. The shouts, the sudden commotion in the black night had caused Cleo's heart to jump violently.

"And it's lucky they can. We nearly ran up on it—my charts show no dangerous reefs around here at all. Look—the moon's coming up."

As she looked away to the glowing horizon he looked down at her, a faint smile playing around one corner of his mouth. "As a matter of fact," he observed, giving her an incongruously cockeyed wink as their eyes met, "the story I just told you happened to be true. Excuse me, please—" Bowing with his customary old world flourish, he left abruptly.

She watched him as he moved swiftly aft to the wheel, the lean muscles beneath his thin shirt and rolled-up duck trousers giving an impression almost of nakedness. What amazing grace the man managed to instill into his least movement! That funny bow at the end, for instance, suggesting the swirling effect of a shouldered cloak and plumed hat, doffed low.

She looked around. Aft on the poop deck Shamus had taken

the helm himself. The half-risen moon cast a dim design of the wheel spokes across his chest. The gleam of the compass binnacle shot its beam upward, illuminating his face in a pale silver glow, highlighting the cheekbones and nostrils. Concentration caused his eyes to stare forth fiercely. The light brown sunburned hair fell back carelessly from a brow that was more than noble: a visage strangely exciting in its calm, strong beauty.

He smiled back when he felt her gaze. And in the wide-set, kindly eyes, with their impression of inner repose, there appeared that strangely wistful, almost sad expression, as if they sought out someone long overdue—or as though his grandmother had just died.

“Seven fathom—less half!”

The cry came from the moonlit prow of the ship. Again the line cut the air with a swishing sound, followed by a faint plop, as the lead entered the water.

“Seven fathom—less half!” repeated the bushy-haired savage standing at her elbow.

Shamus nodded. “We’ll be in soon—if we don’t happen to hit anything.”

“In where?”

“An island of the Siassi group, Bismarck Archipelago. The bay we’re going into now has no name on the chart, but it shows a fair-sized lagoon.”

“What for? What are we goin’ in for?” inquired Jodo tonelessly from behind.

“Fresh water. Native food, if there are any friendly Kanakas close to buy it from. And Mr. Swartz might find their habits interesting. They’re a strange people here—headbinders. They bind their heads in infancy, so when they grow up they look like elongated watermelons. Monogamous, and said to be friendly. We’ll only stop a day.”

“Uh-huh.” Jodo grunted noncommittally. “Any other strange habits—besides monogamy?”

“No, I don’t think—I really couldn’t say,” Shamus corrected himself curtly.

“Five fathom—less quarter!” intoned the leadsman forward.

“Stand by anchor!”

“Stand by anchor!” The order was relayed down the deck in

long drawn out cries.

"Now we're entering the lagoon." Lifting his nose Shamus sniffed the air. "Smell the frangipani? It must be growing wild along the shore. You can tell it a mile away—the loveliest of all smells, don't you think?"

"Umm," sniffed Cleo appreciatively. "Umm—sensuous."

In the light of the moon the gallant coconut palms could be seen fringing the lagoon, a long white beach glittering before them. Above, the dark masses of burly mountains arose, carrying their loads of heavy jungle forests with ease, merging with coconut woods and the cool damp mountain world of heavy trees, thick tree ferns, and sparkling flowers. No meager, bony foliage this, but lush, with fat on its bones—its dark, fungate underbelly hiding a thousand dangers.

Slowly the *Maski* edged shoreward, guided by the swinging lead line, and edged narrowly at last between two sharp niggerheads of coral that lay half awash, a white surge swirling over them on the moonlight.

"Hard 'a starboard!" As the wheel whirled around the *Maski* heeled and nosed into the foam of her own wake. "Leggo'm anchor!"

*Splosh.* As chain rattled happily through hawse Shamus sighed with relief. Even when creeping along so cautiously, a false turn, an order late in execution, and those coral niggerheads would slice through the wooden planks of the boat as a knife sinks into cheese.

When the engine spluttered to a stop a heavy silence fell over the lagoon, a silence so profound it was like a tangible thing. Then suddenly from the shore there came a series of short grunting coughs, repeated complainingly from the mangroves.

"Crocodiles," Shamus observed. "Grumbling at being kicked out of bed. They'll be gone tomorrow."

Later, as the ship quieted for the night, Shamus sat thoughtfully on his shakedown under the poop-deck awning, and ran a hand abstractedly through his hair. Casting one fleeting look toward the companionway down which Cleo had gone just a few minutes before, the vision of her in his bunk once more swiftly rushed through his consciousness and set his pulse to pounding. It would be so easy—so easy—just to walk down there. He could



do it without making a sound. Then to open the door of his cabin—noiselessly—noiselessly— Quickly he put the thought away from him and pulled off his shirt with an angry jerk. Thank God she had made that jibe about his not knowing how to laugh. He didn't know why it annoyed him, but it did. And thank God, too, that the *Maski* had almost hit a reef. The combination of the two had served to bring him to his senses. Sighing, he took off his shoes and socks. Then he paused motionless as he heard somewhere forward the low murmur of a human voice, apparently in monologue.

Walking silently in his bare feet in the direction of the sound, he suddenly saw Jodo curled upon the deck against a coil of rope, Hedda snuggled into the crook of his arm. He was talking to her in a low voice, and, since his back was turned to Shamus, did not see him. Shamus stood motionless and listened.

"—so will you forget it, kid," the boy was saying. "I don't ever wanta hurt ya. I hated burning your feet but I had to do it. I made dough, know what I mean? A nickel here, a dime there—you know. And I *had* to clip Sinbad, the jerk! Anyway, I'll make it up to ya someday. I'll give you anything. If you could only tell me what ya want, I'd get it for ya. I'll let the feathers in your wings grow out and ya can fly away if ya want to. I'll get ya the best-looking goddamn parrot in New Guinea for a lay. Anything ya want. . . . But I liked making a horse'sass outa that bastard. . . ."

Silently Shamus tiptoed away, shaking his head in bewilderment. Who could ever fathom the depths of the human soul? Who in the world would ever be capable of understanding, for instance, Jodo? Apparently their antipathy was mutual. But why? Keeping his back turned resolutely to the companionway, he undressed quickly and went to bed. But that night he slept fitfully, dreaming of a woman with one body and two heads, one of which contained a face like the blossom of a citrus fruit and a smile like that which he imagined the angels wore, and over it was a white starched hood, while the other head was bared to the wind which swept its hair wildly, and below the hair was a face which had the strange fascination of a leopard's, and from the lips issued perpetually wild and maddening laughter.

*Chapter Ten: UNDERWATER STALK*

BY DAYBREAK the following morning Shamus was astir before anyone. Quietly rousing the crew he gave orders for four large empty water butts to be placed in the longboat in case water could be found ashore, some cheap trade articles, colored calico, bush knives, ax-heads, etc., wherewith to barter for the taro, yams and fruit it might be possible to find. And two loaded guns, a shotgun and a rifle, in the longboat's bow. The Siassi tribes were said to be trustworthy, but he had been long enough in New Guinea not to take chances. Although a careful survey of the beach through binoculars disclosed no signs of life, he knew a thousand pairs of eyes could be watching every movement aboard from the dense foliage above the beach and remain unseen.

As yet none of the passengers had appeared on deck, so sending the crew to breakfast he began making certain preparations. A conviction and a desire were prodding strongly at him. He had need to shake off the miasma of indecision which had gripped him the night before. And he knew what would make him feel like himself again.

A curious elation marked his actions as he opened a deck locker and selected certain articles: a pair of Japanese diving-goggles made of bone and rubber; next, a thin steel spear, about five feet long, with two murderous-looking barbs at one end. This spear slid through the inside of a short hollow piece of bamboo, long enough only to fit in the hand, to which was attached a heavy sling. By gripping the bamboo in the left hand, the spear, when pulled back to the full length of the rubber sling, made a fine underwater harpoon.

Shamus spat on his goggles, wiped them off with care and adjusted them to his face. Then he wrapped the lava-lava he always wore at night tight around his loins and slid over the ship's side into the warm glass-still water. After a quick look around below the surface for sharks, he began propelling himself softly toward the nearest reef with the undulating-body rhythm of a fish. The ordinary methods of swimming would have been too noisy.

The coral was alive with thousands of bright multicolored fish who gazed up at him marble-eyed as he glided noiselessly above them in the clear aquamarine, only enough of his face out of water so that he could breathe. He paid no attention to them. He was looking systematically through the water, searching carefully down into every rocky cave and inlet below, peering closely into the dark caverns, in and around the kelp beds and monstrous submarine trees of tentacled seaweed.

Fascinated as always by the wondrous teeming world which lies below the surface, he searched on, letting his body eddy and shift with the undulating current, watching the bright sea gardens moving and swaying in slow and graceful rhythm below.

Suddenly his stomach did a violent flip-flop.

The tentacles looked so much bigger, magnified through the diving glasses, and so did the cold evil eyes glaring up at the end of them where they disappeared under the ledge of rock. The octopus drew in slowly and warily as he drifted by overhead, and Shamus felt an acid taste in his mouth as his stomach dropped down to normal.

Then he spotted what he was looking for. The big, fat, speckled sea bass was watching him too. Lying still in a small rock grotto, not much more than his head showing, his mouth opening and shutting regularly with the pulsing of his gills, his protruding eyes goggled up, fixed and wary.

Shamus froze his body into perfect stillness and let the current take command of it.

Tensely, man and fish watched each other for a few moments. Then the fish relaxed. Nothing to worry about, he decided, giving his tail a lazy flick. He began edging casually along the rocky sides of the grotto.

Limply, Shamus drifted over and away—any sudden movement of arms and legs now would alarm his prey—studying the topography down below. It wasn't going to be easy—to get in the right position he would have to maneuver with infinite care, taking advantage of the current, to get that rocky promontory down there between the two of them.

He drifted for ten minutes or more, and despite the water's warmth he could feel a chill from the motionless drifting beginning to creep into his bone marrow.

Soon, soon now, he would be in the right spot. Now. Cautiously, unhurriedly, he let the breath out of his body and sank in a slight circle with the current.

As he dropped slowly down beneath the surface the fish became suddenly alert at the sight of this strange invader of his realm. He turned to face it. Shamus could see he wasn't alarmed, though—more curious than worried.

Down and down he sank, like an old piece of driftwood, feeling his lungs already beginning to cry for air and fighting the instinct to pop to the surface. He was out of form, he told himself. You have to keep in practice at this—the most thrilling of all chases, one calling for iron control of all the most fundamental human impulses.

Slowly now—slowly and easily—the fish must be watched with the most acute concentration, watched every split second for a sudden dash. But he's still not alarmed—his tail and front fins haven't yet begun to flutter at increased tempo, the sure sign of a fish about to flee an enemy.

Careful. . . . The least little abrupt movement and he'll be off in a flash and a flurry. Try to keep that clump of seaweed between you and his line of vision. If the current will just help a little, ever so little, the position will be perfect. Mark a spot—near the eye, just where the gills end, near the top of his head. Whatever you do, don't be overanxious. Control natural excitement and the reserve oxygen content in lungs will last longer.

Now start drawing your arm back slowly—slowly edge the spear into position. Hold it firmly with your last split second of endurance. Lungs won't explode just yet, although they may feel they're going to.

Aim again and— Now! Let him have it! Hard and savage!

Damnation! The spear's point took him too far back in the soft flank of his belly, and pulled out! A great swirl of cloudy sand and blood and Mr. Speckled Bass was bursting through the water like a crazy torpedo.

Shamus was bursting too. One great shove took him to the surface and he gulped air gratefully. Pulling it in deep he began wiping off his goggles. Well, tough luck—the whole hunt must be started over again. But first, better take a look around. The big boy's dash mightn't have taken him too far. Maybe he

doesn't feel well. He could easily have darted into one of those dark caverns nearby.

Inhaling a deep but easy breath he drifted again, even more cautiously than before. The fish, if anywhere near by, would be scared pink now, aware of his mortal danger.

Wait—that little movement down there, under the ledge? A tail fin—or just a piece of kelp waving in the current? He peered in the gloom.

*Yes! It's him, all right! Beneath that overhanging ledge of rock. Probably his hide-out, where he always runs for refuge from enemies.*

Shamus tensed himself, disciplining every muscle in his body to cool co-ordination. Slowly; don't exhale any bubbles; not one movement faster than the waving of the kelp or coral plants.

Down he dropped. Down, until he could edge over the top of the ledge, brushing the seaweed aside with infinite caution. The fish's hearing underwater, he knew, was much sharper than his own; the slightest scraping sound, and he'd be off again—this time to seek the safety of the open sea.

He readied his spear and hesitated a split second. Well—take a chance; a sudden lunge over the ledge. If the fish fled he would try to lead him.

Gathering his legs under him he gave a hard shove. As he darted through the water so did the fish—at precisely the same instant. But he ran head-on to his fate. The razor-sharp point of the spear took him in the head, behind the eye.

The big fish screamed in his own tongue—an unforgettable sound which you would have to hear to believe. He struggled furiously, the flashing silver of his underbelly twisting and writhing in desperate frenzy.

In the once-still aquamarine both fought desperately amid the rocky grottoes. Lungs bursting, the man strove to reach the surface. The fish tried to sound to rid himself of the steel that was killing him. But there was small chance of it pulling loose this time—the point had bitten into hard bone.

Exerting all his strength, Shamus drew the spear closer to him, forcing the impaled fish overhead. He reached out one hand and felt along the gills. A sudden hard plunge of his fingers and he had a firm grip. Squeezing with all the force left in the

hand he felt the sporadic choking. Suddenly he jerked the spear loose and dropped it—it could be recovered later—and seized the gills by both hands, the death hold.

To kill a fish under water is not so easy. Through the goggles his eyes searched along the satiny skin for a certain spot—a little indentation above the fish's eye, his most vulnerable spot. Carefully he drew the fish closer. Then he leaned forward and bit—hard. Like biting into a crisp turnip, he felt his teeth sink through the soft bone, into the brain. Instantly it fell limp in his hand, trembling with little shuddering reflexes.

He began swimming back to the *Maski*, exhausted but happy. The sweet, flaky meat would taste the better for the knowledge that he had hunted it in its native place, on terms that were more than balanced in the hunted's favor.

Jodo was staring over the ship's side as Shamus swam alongside. Behind the gleaming spectacles his eyes were round and bulging with excitement.

"God!" he croaked, his customary tone of bored cynicism for once absent. "How in hell did you catch that thing?"

"It attacked me." Shamus flipped the water out of his eyes. "Look out!" he called, heaving the fish up on deck to a waiting pair of Kanaka hands.

There came another squeal from the deck.

"Oh, what a beauty! What kind is it?"

"A grouper—one of the bass family. Good eating. Grk—" Having swallowed a mouthful of water, he spluttered into sudden incoherence at the sight above him.

If he had voiced certain objections to Cleo's choice of garments on a previous occasion there was very little, in the most literal sense, for him to cavil at this time.

Leaning against a stanchion she flicked her cigarette ashes into the water with incomparable elegance. The honey hair spiraled off with the morning breeze unchecked. The lithe tenderness of her form, the long smooth legs and knees, admirably pure of shape, presented an unforgettable picture. But at this moment its design and true beauty was lost on him, for the brazen immodesty of her costume made him gasp; a scant pair of very flimsy shorts, and an even flimsier pink bandana handkerchief of extreme décolletage—very obviously it was limited

to that. Again Shamus caught the significant expressions on the faces of his boat's crew, hanging over the rail.

Holding on to the side of the longboat he said in a strained voice, "Would you be kind enough to go and put some clothes on please?"

She laughed. "You'll sink if you try to bow in the water, Captain. I thought you'd squawk. Look out—I'm coming in!"

Poising herself, she flicked the cigarette away and dove over his head into the water.

Shamus hauled himself into the longboat. With set jaws he began pulling his pants on. By the time she came to the surface he was giving orders to have himself rowed ashore.

"I'm coming too," announced Jodo, jumping down from the deck and seating himself in the longboat's stern-sheets. "Hey, what the—"

Shamus said nothing. He took the youth by his shirt and pants bottom and flipped him up on deck again. "Stay where you are," he growled. "Nobody can come ashore yet. Shove off!" he ordered angrily.

The words, he knew, sounded churlish. But quite apart from his exasperation he wasn't permitting anyone on the beach until all possibilities of danger were ruled out.

As the boat pulled away he could see Mr. Swartz and the other two men, who had heard nothing of the passage with Cleo, looking after him puzzled. He cupped his hands and called out, "I'll send the boat back for you right away."

"Okay!" Mr. Swartz waved a hand in understanding.

"Hey—wait for me-e-e!" The plaintive appeal came from about 30 yards away, where she was treading water.

Deliberately ignoring it, he turned his back and sat down in the bow. He felt angry and frustrated.

"Hey! Waaaait!" There was no mistaking the annoyance in her voice.

"Row on," he ordered.

"Then go to hell!" she yelled. "I'll swim!"

He ignored this too. Let her swim—to the devil if she wished. This girl with her arrogant wilfulness was beyond him. Again he assured himself that his sole concern was the general effect of her behavior upon his shipboard authority. There were many

real dangers ahead—particularly when they reached the Sepik River district. A false step, an order not obeyed on the instant, could lead to swift disaster there. Many a schooner had disappeared in the murky reaches of that river, leaving no trace of the ship's complement.

What infuriated him more than anything else was his own inadequacy to cope with her, and the amusement she so obviously derived from knowledge of it.

Across the water from the *Maski* more shouting reached his ears, but he remained loftily unaware. They could shout themselves hoarse as far as he was concerned.

Then suddenly the rowers behind him stopped rowing.

Tulare gripped his arm. "Big fella something!" he said excitedly, standing upon a seat and pointing aft.

"Sharks," the boy Alaman remarked in a bare half key above his usual tone of flat indifference.

Just then a shot rang out from the *Maski*. Swinging around, Shamus saw Mr. Swartz holding a smoking gun in his hand. Simultaneously the boys in the *Maski* began to shout and point. Behind the swimming girl he saw two fins, long and pointed, slicing the water. She had seen them too. There was terror in her frantic movements.

"Rifle!" snapped Shamus. "About ship—fast!"

Tulare jumped for the gun. Shamus seized it and jerked a cartridge in the chamber. Couldn't kill the brute—might scare it off—

Aiming ahead of the fins, he started to press the trigger when something about the shape of the fins made him look again.

"Hold ship!"

Tensely the rowers held their blades poised ready.

Then Shamus fired several times, high and wide into the air. "Swim!" he bellowed. "Swim! Right behind you!"

The rowers, waiting breathlessly for the order to dig into the water again, stared at him in bewilderment.

She was churning up the water like a steamer's screw. Her stroke, he noted, was excellent, and as she drew closer to the long-boat he could see her face taut with stark horror. Quietly he gave the order to start rowing the boat—away from her.

"Swim!" he shouted again, and fired another couple of shots



into the water behind her.

Imperceptibly the boat moved away from the frantically swimming girl, keeping the same distance between them.

When she reached the beach Shamus had to help her ashore. "Thank God!" he said fervently as he held her shaking form. "Another yard and the brute would've had you!"

Trembling, she struggled to regain her wind, too exhausted to speak and too weak to stand up. He carried her up to the beach to the shade of a casuarina tree and waited.

Out of the corner of his eyes, across the lagoon, he could still see the old ray, probably shoal-watering to mate or spawn. The fuss over, he was lazily beginning to sun himself again on the surface, his shark-like side fins, seven feet or so apart across his width, idly slicing the shallow water. The harmless old boy had probably been as badly scared as she was, he thought.

"Sharks," he said grimly. "Two of 'em—great louts of man-eaters—just turning on their sides."

She shuddered with a sudden ague. Gone, now, was all the haughty arrogance. A very small girl looked up at him, wide-eyed and pale. She gulped and struggled weakly to sit up. Shamus knelt to support her, but she shook his arm off violently. Then the reaction set in and she burst into sobs.

Shamus looked at her helplessly, and with a pang of guilt. She swayed and he held her, and as the slender, woeful form clung closely for an instant, conflicting sensations arose within him; he felt a bit ashamed of the hoax, and suddenly quite another indescribable sensation—again that breathlessness which he had felt last night, a tingling weakness which set his head to ringing and a sudden swelling in his throat.

"Oooh!" she gasped at last, dabbing her eyes with a fold of his shirt. She gulped and what color was left began draining from her face again. "I'm going to be sick," she said tearfully.

He lifted her up, bent over, doubled.

"Then let go," he suggested gently. "Try thinking of a piece of boiled pork, a lot of fatty blubber, oozing grease—"

"Oh, shut up! Leave me alone, you jerk!"

She watched him walking away, a bit crushed-looking in his lithe leanness. In a thousand years, she was thinking, not in a thousand years, could he ever realize the dark depths of humilia-

tion nausea combined with running mascara and fright could cause a girl.

### *Chapter Eleven: SWIMMERS IN THE MOONLIGHT*

IN THE forenoon a stiff breeze from the north sprang up, and from what had been earlier smooth water and a brisk sailing breeze with a good slant, began turning into a nasty cross-sea.

Fresh water had been found in a running brook and taken aboard, but no contact had been made with any natives. Native gardens had been discovered by the three members of the boat's crew sent out to forage. These had apparently been abandoned, but a fairly wide variety of native foods still grew in them. In case the owners should return, trade goods had been left in payment and the foragers returned to the ship well laden.

Shamus was anxious to get under way, but the rising white caps out to sea hardly looked inviting. So rather than start what would be at best a most uncomfortable passage across the Bismarck Archipelago, he postponed sailing until the following day.

By a stroke of good luck one of the gun boys sent out to hunt had brought in a fat young wild sow. This and a good haul of slender garfish, a wonderfully succulent fish, taken by throw-net in the still water of the lagoon, made him decide to prepare a *kulakai kai*, a feast, on the beach that evening.

During most of the day he had been avoiding Cleo, his mind in a dull whirl. He had thought that he could wipe out the impulse of the evening before by his undersea encounter with the bass in the morning. And, to be sure, when she had started to swim after him that morning, in her abbreviated swim suit, he had found himself coldly indifferent to what happened to her. Yet, in that instant when he had mistaken the ray for two sharks and thought that she was in real danger, he had found himself choking with panic in a sudden overpowering fear of loss. Yet when he saw that she was not in any danger, his mood of indifference and desire to make her uncomfortable had returned. But again, when on the shore she had hung on his arm, a wet and ill and badly frightened child, he had felt that dizzying wave of desire and called himself a fool for not having gone silently and surely to her cabin in the dark of the night and

taken what he was sure she was offering him. Now he was weary of thinking about it, of fighting the battle within himself. He would throw himself into the feast as though it were a formal banquet and he the host. He would even break down the barriers of his own reticence, and talk—talk, as he had never talked before. He would get himself drunk, and show that he could hold his liquor with dignity. He would do these things and quit thinking, quit trying to decide anything. Let whatever happened happen, and to hell with the weary attempts of his mind to figure anything out. But first he would wash some of the confusion out of his head in the clear fresh wind of the sea.

The longboat was lying hauled up on the beach. Bidding Alaman help him, Shamus shoved it into water deep enough to float, and began hoisting sail.

The fresh breeze snatched and clawed at the flapping red-ocher canvas, so that he didn't hear her splashing through the shallow water behind. But he felt the boat tip as she climbed in.

"I want to go out to the *Maski*, please," she commanded airily.

The blue jeans were rolled up above her knees. Brown bare legs hanging over the gunwale, she wriggled her toes in the water, leaning back remotely in the stern.

Shamus had just made fast the main halyard at the base of the mast. He didn't stop coiling the line, but as he looked at her his mouth set in a hard line. Suddenly he tossed the coil of wet rope at her.

"Hang hold of that," he said, as it settled over her head. "And pull on it when I tell you."

Surprised, Cleo extricated herself and let the line drop in the bottom of the boat with an expression as if a clumsy waiter had spilled soup over her.

The canvas began bellying out in the breeze. Shamus scrambled aft, pushed her aside, and seized the mainsheet. Hauling it in fast, he shoved the tiller hard over and into her ribs. "Ouch!" she exclaimed resentfully. "That hurt."

"Duck!" barked Shamus. He gave her head a hard shove downward as the boom swung overhead with a wicked lunge.

"Listen, you—" Cleo began indignantly.

"Be still!" growled Shamus. "Sit down and shut up or I'll toss you over the side!"

Flabbergasted, Cleo subsided.

The wind caught the little jib. Then the mainsail grew taut and bellied out. The boat's head swirled around. She heeled over and ran off down wind at a fine clip.

It was a glorious sailing breeze. Shamus changed course and held her nose up into it. Overhead a pair of gulls wheeled and planed in long gliding spirals. Across the blue lagoon the sea sparkled richly in the sun's glitter. With satisfaction he felt the sting of the salt spray in his face.

"Would you mind," said Cleo acidly, "telling me where we're going? I said I wanted to go to the *Maski*."

Shamus looked aloft to see how the mainsail was drawing. A slight flutter shook it, so he luffed off a little. "Be quiet," he said shortly. "You'll go when I'm ready to take you."

He flung a leg over the tiller and held it in the crook of his knee. Cleo watched him, expressionless, as he lit a cigarette and puffed on it with composure. He changed course again and the little boat began to buck and toss as she headed into a heavy ground swell.

"I hope," she said at last with a cool smile, "you don't think this kind of thing impresses me."

Shamus made no answer. The boat bucked and pitched, dipping her nose into the sea. Suddenly she shipped the first solid mass of flying spray. It came over in a white sheet, thoroughly dousing Cleo. The shock made her gasp, but immediately she resumed her attitude of casual boredom, far from convincing on account of the water streaming down her face.

The water kept coming over by the bucketful, but she faced it stoically. Shamus, she noted, was practically dry, and at last she began to suspect that the boat was being held deliberately on a course calculated to keep her soaked. She rose to seek more protection.

With detachment Shamus pushed her down again—without even looking at her.

"Don't you do that to me!" she yelled at him in sudden fury. "I'm soaking! And you're trying to keep me soaked! And I'm getting cold, too!"

"I didn't ask you to come."

He chose that moment as she stared in the other direction to

haul in hard on the mainsheet. The boat heeled suddenly and dipped her gunwale deep in the scudding sea. Foaming green water flooded over the side and Cleo uttered a little gasp of fright. Only a quick grab had saved her from being flung out of her seat and overboard.

"Please don't move around," grated Shamus coldly. "That was nearly a capsized. If you don't want to find yourself swimming around among the sharks, sit still."

Bending over he picked up a rope's end and put it in her hands. "Since you're here, you might as well make yourself useful. Here—haul in on this."

Gingerly she held the line between thumb and forefinger. "What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Pull on it—haul it in."

Frightened by what she believed had been a near disaster, she obeyed.

"Hard!" ordered Shamus. "Hurry up—I'm going about!"

The rope she held was only the belayed end of a backstay. She couldn't have budged it an inch without pulling the bottom out of the boat. Shamus watched her heave and struggle with satisfaction. "Pull, dammit!" he bellowed at her. "Pull!"

"I am, goddam you!" she gasped back furiously.

"Look out!" Jibbing suddenly, he swung the tiller hard over, and as before shoved her head down. The boom swung across with a jolting rush and Cleo looked up dazed.

"Call that pulling?" he sneered disgustedly as the boat righted itself. "Give me that line." With an expression of granite he jerked it out of her hands and dropped it in the sloshing water of the bilge.

A half-hour passed in silence. Cleo, her hair hanging in sodden stringiness, sat huddled in her seat, dripping, shivering, and looking at him with smoldering fury. "You bastard," she muttered once, but apparently Shamus didn't hear it. Although he also was feeling the cold bite of the driven spray, inwardly he was savoring the keen satisfaction of having at last asserted himself.

The little boat heeled and danced and lunged and sent the green sea flying into white cascades.

"If the damn boat turns over it's your fault," Cleo prophesied

darkly.

Shamus paid no attention. But as they rounded the last headland behind which the *Maski* lay at anchor, he burst into raucous song:

*So you stick to the ship, boys,  
And I'll save me li-i-i-fe—  
I've got to be home by seven o'clock  
To get a divorce from me wi-i-i-fe.*

"Oh, for God's sake—" Cleo's teeth chattered miserably as she spoke "—can't we p-p-p-lease go back now? I'm seasick, too, and—"

Just then the *Maski* hove into sight. He let the mainsheet run through his fingers, and as if by magic the longboat was slipping smoothly along in the still waters of the lagoon, sheltered by the lee of the headland.

Soon she was scudding swiftly under the *Maski's* broad stern, close enough to reach out and touch it. He luffed her up sharply and the boat glided to a smooth stop, nicely hove to along the companionway.

Shamus stood up with a courtly bow. "You said you wanted to go aboard, I think?"

Cleo said nothing. Like an elderly aristocrat much harassed by misfortune, she rose stiffly and clambered aboard.

"Any time you'd care to take a little spin—"

"Oh, go to hell," she muttered weakly.

Extremely gratified, Shamus ran the boat back to the beach, to report his plans for a shore dinner.

The prospect of a divergence from shipboard food met with the enthusiasm of all hands. The longboat manned by Kanakas was dispatched to look for young reef lobsters and shrimp. Jodo wanted to go, but was put to work gathering rocks instead, these to be placed at the bottom of a fair-sized pit dug in the sand. A fire was then lit on top of the rocks and Jodo instructed to keep it blazing. "Boy Scout stuff," he sneered, but obeyed with a shrug after catching Shamus's eye.

Whitey and Jimmy were detailed to gather ripe coconuts, no difficult job, since there were hundreds lying around, but their efforts to split them open caused a lot of merriment among the Kanakas.

Cleo's chore was to scrape the white meat of the nuts, press the scrapings, and squeeze out the thick cream; than which there is nothing better to pour over tropical fruits, for the cream loses the taste of coconut and acquires a unique, far better one.

Shamus set to preparing the young sow. He skinned and gutted, and then stuffed her—two different kinds of bananas and coconut sprouts, soft, delicate buds, taken from the very tops of the swaying trees, which taste like artichokes. For seasoning, chutney, koa leaves, and certain wild jungle herbs the Kanakas know how to find. Sewed up with strong sail twine and wrapped in whole pandanus leaves, the pig was placed carefully on the white-hot rocks, damp earth shoveled on top, and left to cook for four hours.

Toward evening the ocher-colored sail of the longboat hove around the point, swiftly beating her way to windward across the wide lagoon. As she luffed up near the beach everyone ran down excitedly to look over the haul. Up in the bow stood Alaman, phlegmatically holding by one supine leg the main catch—a fair-sized turtle.

"Great! Just what we needed!" exclaimed Shamus. "We'll be in luck if it's a female."

"A female? For what—why?" demanded Jodo, his interest instantly captured by any mention of sex or gender.

"She'll have eggs in her belly. They'll make a fine batter to cook the garfish." He waded out to the boat. "Oysters!" he called back cheerfully. "Crawfish, and lobsters too."

A few trochus and large bêtes-de-mer, or sea slugs, lay in the bottom of the boat too. But these, he explained, except for soup seasoning, were more suitable to a Kanaka palate. "But I promise you we'll dine well tonight."

At last everything was ready. The brief twilight fell glimmering over the lagoon. And as darkness fell the Kanaka boys set fire to the dried brush torches prepared earlier and which stood now stuck upright in the sand around the table. The table consisted merely of large pandanus leaves laid on the ground, large wild hibiscus flowers strewn over it. But in such a setting it could have been the festive board of ancient Melanesian kings.

"Another toddy, anyone?"

Shamus had made a strong punch, mixing liberal doses of

rum with the water of young coconuts. In keeping with his plan, he had drunk heartily of it himself, and was feeling its effects pleasantly. Now he broke a rule and issued a double jigger of rum to the crew. Not that they needed it. Singing lustily, they busied themselves with last-minute preparations for the important ritual of digging up the pig. Then, as the first shovelful of earth was removed and they stood around the torch-lit pit, the song changed suddenly to a low and solemn chant.

"Look!" said Shamus, pointing into the hills. Just below the rising moon, licking forth like a silver tongue, a thin, cool band of water fell down the dark green walls of the jungle. The waterfall was far away and no sound from it reached them. But it seemed as if the great moon itself had begun to leak, miraculously overflowing with molten silver.

Low and sad, the chant rose and fell, fading away to dark echoes into the jungle.

"Sounds a bit like a Negro spiritual," said Cleo in an awed voice.

"I suppose you'd call it an ancestral prayer song," Shamus explained. He found her voice going to his head again, setting the conflict of the night before stirring in him once more, and hastily took another drink and told himself to keep on talking. "Like saying grace—giving thanks for the bounty of the gods," he said. "They'll start to dance as the pig's brought up. By the way, I have a wonderful surprise. Come over here."

Everybody crowded around him except Mr. Swartz. The coconut toddies having won his warm approval, he was now on his fourth. He was staring at the waterfall, his spectacles glinting in the moonlight. "Ah, fabulous vision," he murmured sadly. "There are no words for you—no words for you—"

With a sigh and a hopeless gesture he fell silent. Lost in beauty, he was at the same time sunk in gloom by the sense of transience and futility beauty sometimes brings. Beauty could go to extremes too, he was thinking. That waterfall, for instance; so damnably beautiful, it was as depressing as the unattainable, pouring down, ageless, noiseless, lovely. . . .

Suddenly he was aware of a strange and powerful emotion—an impression of a suspension of time, as if with the passage of every second he was living several years. He felt his heart begin



to pound with hammer blows, and his eyes stare glazed at the glistening band of water. Sweat in little beads broke out on his forehead as he stood transfixed, held immobile with the painful intensity of his emotion. *God*, he thought, *God!* Was this the beginning of time, or the end? Was this how ancient peoples developed their gods? How a lake came to be enchanted, for instance? Or how a deity was conjured up from the dark and mystic depths of a crater? Taken unawares by the terrible intensity of his strange emotion, held as if in a trance, he felt the years ticking by. Hopelessly he gave himself up to the terrible ecstasy of living in suspended time. The tears gushed into his eyes, streaming unnoticed down his chubby cheeks.

"Ah, Beauty," he murmured in a faraway voice of infinite compassion. "Ah, Beauty, there is too much to you. I cannot bear it."

All at once the spell was broken, taking him by surprise again, and leaving only a deep and desolate ache of abandonment. He was trembling, but with a supreme effort he pulled himself together.

"That," he said in a low voice, "should be photographed," and, to hide the tears in his eyes, turned away and stared out over a blurred sea.

"Uh-huh." Whitey sucked air through his teeth and half cocked a professional eye at the sight. "No one'd ever believe it on the screen, though. Looks phony—like too much money's been spent on it—like a Warner Brothers moon."

"Yes, it's lovely, but the surprise?" Cleo turned away and clasped her hands together, excitedly. "What's the surprise?"

"Listen," rasped Jodo, "why don't we surprise ourselves by starting to eat." Sentiment of any kind, particularly the abstract, bored him. *So it's a waterfall*, he was thinking, irritably. *Is that what was eating Swartz? The silly old bastard looked like he was crying a moment ago. Drunk himself into a crying jag! You turn a tap on and that makes a waterfall, too. So what?* "I got a wish for a dish, for Chrissake. Let's eat!" He liked making pithy rhymes of speech.

"Eat!" exclaimed Cleo. "You've already eaten half a dozen bananas, let alone the rest of the stuff you've been snitching. Come on, tell us—what's the surprise?"

"Ah, yes. . . ." Smiling like a benevolent host, Shamus gazed around. "This is something you will never suspect. I've had them a long time. Wait!"

With the gesture of a magician about to reveal a woman sawed in half, he bent down and lifted up a large pandanus leaf, disclosing six bottles lying on their sides.

"Look at them!" he exclaimed proudly. "Look—like aristocrats lying in a common sepulcher. And look, I beg you, at the labels! I've had 'em jammed in the ship's bilge to keep cool for months. Fabulous—of the very finest years. . . ."

"But what are they? What's in 'em?" Peering down closely, Jodo looked puzzled.

"Three of Romanee Saint Vivant 1929—and three Moselles that are unsurpassed. Not quite cold enough, unfortunately. They should be iced. But Ruppertsburger Diedel, of the finest year that ever was—1921. This is a wine—" reverently, as if removing a royal scepter from a velvet cushion, he picked up a bottle and displayed it "—that courses through one's veins like a rich, warm, liquid fire!"

There was a brief silence. Shamus's veer to such surprising rhetoric had cast a momentary spell over his audience.

"No kidding," said Jodo, leaning over to pick up a bottle.

He leaned, but no more. A hand of steel gripped him by the back of his shirt.

"My lad," said Shamus sternly. "You have much to learn, I know. One of the first things is—never touch a sleeping bottle."

"What the hell—aren't we going to drink it?" demanded Jodo angrily, squirming under the grip.

Shamus released him and patted the boy on the head. Solemnly he shook his own. "We," he said with emphasis, "are not. Not you anyway—you're too young to be appreciative. Now—" he turned with precise enthusiasm to the others "—shall we dine? Mr. Swartz, here please. Mr. O'Donnel and Mr. Dodds here, and you, Miss Charnel, if you will honor us, at the head here."

"Where'll I sit?" asked Jodo sourly.

"Anywhere you like, my little man," said Shamus with a gracious wave of his hand. "And eat your fill." He looked at Jodo and smiled. His words sounded strange in his own ears, for he knew as well as anyone how taciturn he was. But he had de-

cided that tonight he was going to talk. It was a part of his program. It went along with the eating and the drinking on which he had decided. He went on inanely. "Tonight, oddly enough, I find you possessed of a great deal of natural charm. Tonight," he stressed. "Now—" he smacked his lips and sat down rather unsteadily "—we shall uncork the Moselle—"

All took their seats, looking slightly bewildered. Somehow Shamus's imperial mood was too grandiose to be made light of. Even Cleo, who had at first worn an expression of suppressed amusement, sat down obediently on a leaf on the sand.

"Jerk's drunk!" muttered Jodo under his breath, squatting next to Cleo and eyeing Shamus disgustedly. He was still smoldering.

"Only a little," whispered Cleo. "But I don't want to miss this. And don't call him names either."

"Then what goes with him calling *me* names? That 'little man' stuff bores me, the jerk! I bet I can drink more—"

"Shut up!" Cleo growled the words, giving him a look of such ferocity it caused him to subside and look at her in surprise.

Slyly his glance went back to Shamus, who was now pouring the light amber-colored wine and speaking of its qualities: "—and of such a delicate bouquet, so pure in body," he was saying, "that even the constant pitching around in a ship's bilge will not cause it to grate on the tongue. Ah—out of a thousand, the only wines one can ever consider are the Burgundies and Moselles, in my opinion. As for champagnes—well, personally, I was never able to either drink or afford them. I must say, though, I like to recall the words of the ancient monk who discovered champagne. 'Come quickly!' the good man cried to his brethren from the cellar of the monastery, 'come quickly—I am drinking stars!'"

Shamus looked around the group owl-eyed. "I like that, don't you? Drinking stars—that's pretty good, don't you think? After all, the drinking of wine is not an end in itself—there should be poetry attached to it, doncha think? There's far too much of the mundane in the world! Not nearly enough beauty, poetry, imagination. Wine contributes to such things; as opposed to alcohol of course, a cheap and tawdry way of escaping the realities of this life. My Uncle Desmond, who escaped more than anyone I

ever heard of, wrote quite a lot of poetry about wine; in French, by the way, and incidentally the only good thing about the French is their wine. And the only good thing about Uncle Desmond was his poetry. But that, of course, was when he knew which end of the pen to write with."

Finishing his discourse with a mellow laugh, Shamus rose unsteadily to his feet and toasted everyone in flowery terms. "May you be happy!" he cried with a flourish. "And may your nostrils never inhale aught but the liquid transformation of crushed rose petals! The goodly Moselle! *Salud!*"

"Jesus!" muttered Jodo. "What's got into the guy? That cooking sherry must have hit him between the eyes. He's plastered, the bastard!" Angrily, Cleo started to protest, but Jodo suddenly leaned close and rasped in a thrusting whisper, "You're stuck on him!"

The blunt accusation, coming in the middle of the toast and a swallow of wine, took Cleo off guard. She lowered her glass and looked at Jodo for the space of several seconds. "You little runt!" she said in a voice of corrosive sublimate. "Mind your own business. You're nuts."

"Yeah?" leered Jodo, with a significant, heavy-lidded wink. "I know hot pants when I see 'em, sister. Don't kid me."

Tripping in across the lagoon, the waves rippled softly on the shore, lighting up like little phosphorus snakes trying to wriggle up on the beach. And as the moon rose to the top of the palms, the flowing husks of the orange-red torches lit and shadowed the faces of the replete diners.

To the stamping of feet, muffled by the sand, and a low, excited chant that went back, perhaps, a thousand years, the pig had come forth, crisp and yielding. The leaves were stripped from her and the good hot smell of the meat merged with the sweet perfume of night flowers as the leaves fell from the succulent carcass. For the moment it was put aside near the hot rocks.

First, the rock oysters were eaten with the Moselle. Everybody drank it with reverence, conscious of the scrutiny of Shamus, who eyed each glass like a conductor of an orchestra leading his favorite symphony and watching every instrument. Then there came crab—coconut crab, sweet white meat. Then the lobsters, broiled and dipped in mustard sauce. Afterward the turtle, eaten

with baked potatoes, charred black in their skins in the hot coals. The garfish, crisp enough to eat between fingers, melted in the mouth.

At last, with the wild native vegetable, taro, buttered with bananas, the pig was placed in the center of the pandanus fronds. Its succulent crackling curling up like carpet ends, the coconut kernels juicy like young apples inside, it smelled as it should and looked magnificent. Although washed down with the glowing Burgundy, it was more a decoration than food, for not even Jodo could do more than pick at it. There had been much singing and dancing, Kanaka dances, which grew wild as the evening drew on. But the white people could hardly move.

"Phew!" exclaimed Mr. Swartz, leaning back against the stem of a coconut tree wiping his brow. "Never in my life did I enjoy anything so much! But how I wish I had some bicarb of soda! I guess this is what you'd call having your cake and eating it."

"Yeah, but was that a meal, or what?" said Whitey. "You don't know how I envy you folks—eating everything you want."

Extracting two pills from his shirt pocket he swallowed them and looked out to sea appreciatively. "Reminds me of the times we used to go picnicking up the Mississippi!" he continued. "Except we drank mulberry wine and ate diamond backs instead of sea turtle."

No one answered, and after a moment Cleo rose and stretched her right leg with a little exclamation.

"What's wrong, honey?" inquired Mr. Swartz kindly, lighting his pipe and watching her with secret amusement.

"Got a crick in it." Cleo moved the offending limb up and down several times.

"Oh," Mr. Swartz sounded mildly concerned. "You know, that Alaman," he resumed, "there's an interesting guy. He told me his father was a cannibal. But a very gentle and kind old man. Just mention human flesh, however, he said, and the old guy's eyes would begin to shine. Like a man who'd been deprived of some delicacy for a long time. He claimed it tasted a bit like pork—young, tender pork. Didn't care for white men's flesh, though. Claimed it was too salty."

"Perfectly correct," announced Shamus solemnly. "White men should never be eaten."

"No? Well, who would have thought that!" Jodo's sarcasm was heavy. "I guess we oughta only eat black men?"

"Absolutely!" stated Shamus emphatically. "By all means. However, don't misunderstand me. I am by no means advocating cannibalism; merely defending it, on philosophical grounds. Just because anyone of us might pause before tearing into a piece of human broil, your true cannibal's stomach would probably revolt at the mere smell of a glass of, well—Old Grand-Dad, for instance. And while a cannibal gourmet couldn't be induced to taste a white man, knowing their failings and diet, any more than you or I, no reasonable objections can be set up against a good, clean-living, healthily fed savage. Or a tender, opium-flavored Chinaman, which, by the way, I am told is very sweet—much tastier than the flesh of an ox or a pig."

"With a jug of crushed rose petals, I suppose?" interjected Jodo.

Still garrulous. Shamus ignored him. "The only one who might reasonably deplore cannibalism is the vegetarian. But apart from him it can be attacked only upon social or moral grounds—since it implies the taking of life. Personally, I don't like the idea of eating—well, beetle-pie, for instance—but I'll defend anyone else's right to eat it if he feels like it. How do we know what will suit our taste?"

Imperially he stared around the table until his eye fell upon Jodo. "You, for instance," he said, pointing at the boy, "are just about the right size and age for the pot, if somewhat lean. Although personally," he reconsidered with a frown, "I would be prone to pass you over in favor of the Blue Plate." He added a hearty laugh to this sally, although he had no idea what the expression meant, apart from having heard it used quite often in shipboard table repartee.

"Yeah?" The notion failed to amuse Jodo.

"What's the matter, darling?" inquired Cleo with a touch of malice. "You might look fairly attractive surrounded by a few mushrooms and some asparagus."

"Or smothered in onions," suggested Whitey. "And maybe an apple in his mouth. . . ."

While the gastric possibilities of Jodo were being toyed with, Shamus rose quietly to his feet with a murmured excuse. His

head was swimming alarmingly. Only by a supreme effort of will was he able to keep his feet without swaying. He wandered off in the direction of the beach. A few minutes' solitude, he felt, were necessary to pull himself together.

And besides, he was sick of his pretense, tired of talking, tired of drinking. And anyway, he had known, as he looked at Cleo in the firelight, and seen, with mounting excitement, how she looked at him, that—well, what the hell? He hadn't solved anything. Why, he asked himself, had he ever consented to take this trip? Why hadn't he been content to go back to England immediately, carrying with him the pure, uncomplicated memory of Ganice? He kicked angrily at the sand and strode on down the beach.

Cleo let him get a fair start and then began having more trouble with the crick in her leg. She rose and hobbled a few more paces up and down first, in the frail hope that her exit wouldn't be too obvious.

"That's right, honey, better take a little walk," Mr. Swartz was kind enough to call after her.

"There won't be much walking," muttered Jodo, stretched out on his back on the sand. "For either of them."

Mr. Swartz gave him a sharp look. "I thought you were asleep," he said.

"Did you?" said Jodo. "Well, I wasn't. I was thinking." Stifling a yawn, he suddenly finished it with his high-pitched cackle of sardonic amusement: "—the liquid transformation of crushed rose petals—" he mimicked. His distortion of Shamus's voice and manner was subtle enough to be very vicious. "Sounds like faggot talk, for God's sake." He laughed again. "Maybe Cleo's in for a disappointment. Would that be a laugh? Why don't the jerk learn how to drink? He's stinkin'—from drinkin'."

Raising his head for a look down the beach after the object of his scorn, he let it drop back on the sand. For a moment he considered thinking about what it was about the guy that always got on his nerves. Immediately he decided it wasn't worth the trouble and pulled a curtain of cold, detached contempt across his mind. He had eaten too much.

Shamus came to a sudden halt and peered into the shallows a

few yards away. Lit by the moonlight, the water was crystal clear. He was almost certain he had perceived a shape like a long, thin fish, swimming along parallel to him.

When he stopped, the thing stopped too. Now it seemed to be staring out at him intently from the shallow water, as if it had something to say.

Shamus gave his head a quick shake to try and clear it. This, he thought, was bad. Followed by fish! It was the sort of thing that might have happened to Uncle Desmond.

He looked again, then made a sudden quick sortie down to the water's edge; whereupon the fish, who happened to be no illusion, immediately darted off into the deeper water.

Shamus began to laugh aloud—and in the same breath immediately checked himself. That wasn't too good either. Drawing himself up with dignity, he inhaled a deep breath, casting a furtive look back along the beach. He felt dizzy than before. But on no account must the others be allowed to suspect him of insobriety, particularly the boy, in whose cold eyes a while back he seemed to have detected a certain measure of scorn.

Again he peered to see if the fish was there. It wasn't. But the water looked cool and inviting. Ah, a swim! Nothing like a dip to clear the brain.

With one more glance back along the beach to be sure he was unobserved, he quickly pulled his clothes off and took a running dive into the water. It shocked briefly and then wrapped warmly about him. Ah—how good it felt—kindly, illusive, yet infinitely friendly and warm.

He took a deep breath and allowed his body to float face downward, luxuriating in the soft enveloping caress of the limpid water, yielding himself sensuously to its complete enfoldment of his naked body. He turned over lazily onto his back, and, raising his head slightly, could see the fire, a quarter of a mile down the beach and a little back, with the sprawled figures of Doc, Whitey, Jim, and Jodo but dimly distinguishable. And in the background three of the Kanakas. The rest were obviously in the shadows. But where was Cleo? He had left her by the fire with the others.

His question was answered when a figure on the beach, near him, stepped into the line of his vision. For a moment she stood silently looking out at him, then he could see her, silhouetted



against the glow of the fire, stretching her arms above her head. A short struggle with the dress occurred. Other more intimate garments began to fly. The next instant she was running down the beach. A quick header into the water, a few short strokes, and she was facing him.

"Damn!" she gurgled, treading water and reaching an ivory arm up to her head. "I forgot all about keeping my hair dry. I'll look like a rat." He could see her excited, but friendly, smile in the moonlight. "Mind?" she asked. "I found your clothes on the beach, and it seemed a swell idea." She trod water, still smiling at him. "As I believe I've said before, what's good for the boys is good for the girls."

"Of course," Shamus said. He still was treading water, in the position to which he had sunk when she approached. This, he was thinking, was the most—he couldn't think of the right word—disorderly situation. Pagan, that's what it was. As clear as in a lighted mirror, the moon revealed the full outline of her body, shimmering and incandescent, divine in the rippled wavelets beneath the surface. How he was going to do any swimming under the present circumstances, he couldn't quite figure out, but then, he suddenly realized, with a little start, and a sense of choked turbulence which was only partly embarrassment, she was in exactly the same predicament as he was. "Freedom of the seas, and all that, eh?" he finished, weakly, his voice muffled. She laughed, an impish laugh with her head tossed back, wanton and taunting.

With a forward kick under water, and an awkward paddling, he backed away from her and looked at her with an eager boldness of which he wouldn't have thought himself capable before dinner. Her smile was genuinely friendly and frankly mischievous. The fair curls now hung in damp wisps, but they still gleamed bright honey in the moonlight, sweeping cleanly off the strange olive skin of her brow. Now she looked like a small girl again, he thought, a very naughty small girl, enjoying her naughtiness so charmingly that the sight of her would instantly disarm anyone who had thought of reproving her. Indeed, what would there be to reprove? One must be conscious of wrongdoing before it becomes wrongdoing.

With that strange sense of abstraction engendered by wine,

Shamus found himself remembering something which Chesterton had once said: *Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like a pain, or a smell.* He heard himself laughing, and wondered why he was doing that. Chesterton, maybe. The vast Chesterton would look very funny, he was thinking, floating around like a naked cork in a situation like this. But he would certainly know what to do, and Shamus didn't. Yet he was in a strange state of exhilarated peace—at least that was the phrase he used in his mind. Funny phrase, because moment by moment he felt excitement mounting in him. That was the exhilaration. But along with it went a sense of well-being, and the sudden conviction that the conflict which had been troubling him so for days was really not half so important as he had allowed it to seem. All that mattered that moment was that it was heaven just then to be drifting on the top of the ocean in the moonlight with Cleo.

Her voice interrupted, gay, and yet tender, too.

"Come on," she said, "let's swim."

"What?" said Shamus blankly. He hadn't properly absorbed her words due to the dizziness which filled his ears, that faraway buzzing noise which serves to cut out lesser sounds and accentuates the beating of the heart.

"Let's swim." Flattening herself out on the water with a quick backward kick, she settled down to a long slow crawl, and Shamus, after a moment's hesitation, caught up with her. At each stroke of her right arm, her head would roll around so that for a flashing instant she faced him, her eyes gay and beckoning, and Shamus found his own strokes bringing him closer and closer to her, and that he was less and less conscious of his nakedness or even hers, but only of their closeness in the vastness of the sea. For a time, they swam wordlessly, side by side, their churning feet leaving a trail of faint phosphorescence behind them, their fingers dripping diamonds in the moonlight, as they raised them in their strokes, and then Cleo relaxed and, letting her feet down, trod water and faced him, smiling.

"Gosh, it's lovely," she said. "Why does anyone put up with all the nuisances of civilization—especially civilized ideas of the way to act?"

"I was just wondering," Shamus said. His voice was low in

his throat, and he sucked his breath in sharply as his hand touched hers under the water.

For a little time they drifted, wordlessly, and then Shamus felt sand under his feet and realized that the tide, which had been carrying them farther and farther inshore, had taken them onto a sandbank. His feet had only touched it when a gentle swell threw Cleo against it, too. She stumbled a little, clutched his arm to keep her balance, and for a brief, incredible moment, her body was against his in the water, and Shamus found himself trembling. Then she was standing close to him and, her arms about his neck, she was looking deeply and seriously into his eyes.

"Oh, darling," she whispered. "To hell with pretenses. I suppose I could get frightened at a fish or something and throw myself into your arms for protection, or stumble again and fall against you and stay there. But do I *have* to?"

Suddenly she broke away from him, let her feet down, and pushed her way up the sandbar until the water was just above her waist. Facing him, she threw her arms out wide.

"Look at me," she challenged, her head high. "Don't you want me? Don't you want me at all?"

For a moment, Shamus stood motionless, facing her, their eyes meeting in the moonlight, while hammers began pounding in his head and the breath choked in his throat and stayed there. A strange physical numbness, a lassitude, took possession of him for a moment and then all at once ceased plaguing.

"Shamus—"

"Come here." His voice was low, almost unrecognizable, and there was nothing very gentle in the way he reached out and lifted her into his arms. And the first kiss was savage, too, and seemed to be revenge for pain and torment, wanting to hurt. And as he splashed his way to the beach he hardly knew where he went, and didn't care, only felt the long lithe of her body, and her breasts, soft undulant mountains of softness, crushing against him; saw her eyes, vaguely lit, serious, staring up into his with a calm softness in them, yet eager, her lips parted in a sort of wonder.

The deep shadows of a caşuarina tree enclosed them. Immense with fragrance, the sweet smell of night-blooming jungle flowers

drifted down on an offshore breeze. Wave ripples splashed on the beach in a million myriad spearlets of silver, while beyond the lagoon the dark ocean stretched, vastly mysterious. Lips met, parched and trembling, and met again fiercely, and didn't stop, not even when a new salt taste, the cloudy tang of blood, his or hers, mingled with the taste of sea salt. And it was a very good place to transcend the barriers that separate one human from another. . . .

### *Chapter Twelve: HANGOVER*

SHAMUS sat up on the edge of his shakedown in the gray light of the early morning and wearily let his head sink into his hands. A dull pain, which seemed to have its origin in the base of his skull, kept pushing forward to his eyes. But this, of itself, was nothing. Though being drunk was a rare, rather than an accustomed, thing for him, he had known the discomfort and inconvenience of a hangover before, and was enough of a realist in matters which he understood to take such discomfort and inconvenience in his stride. The things which really hurt, the things which made a man loath to face the day and his fellowmen, were things which he could not understand, things which had the power to make him want to hide where no one could see him, nursing the corroding pain of humiliation.

He reviewed bitterly the events of the night before. He had planned to get drunk, and he had succeeded in that. He had talked inanelly and continuously, trying to shut out the wearing conflict which had been torturing him. Then the naked swim, and Cleo suddenly appearing beside him as though she were a sea sprite. What happened after that had wiped out all conflict, all thought, all confused attempts to make a choice. It had seemed very beautiful to Shamus, something which had hidden within it a deep meaning that it was unnecessary to attempt to elucidate. Strangely, in the moment of their coming together it had not occurred to him to think that in this act he was showing any disloyalty to his yearning for Ganice—that thought was to come later. Indeed, the event with Cleo had been a thing devoid of thought—in that lay one of the great elements of its beauty and joyousness to him. It had seemed as natural—and as joyous—as

the phosphorescence of the sea or the rising of the moon. It had not occurred to him then that it meant any less to her.

But later, on the *Maski*, the greatest and most painful shock he had ever known in his life had come to him. The night was well spent when they had returned, and, since everyone was replete with food and drink, there was no delay in preparations for sleep. The ship quickly quieted, and Shamus found himself alone in his quarters on the poop deck. For a moment he sat quietly on the edge of his shakedown, reveling in the relaxation and sense of release from confusion which the evening had brought to him, blessing Cleo, with a strangely childlike gratitude and adoration. Then he rose, and swiftly went to the companionway which led down to her cabin. It was only that he wanted to tell her goodnight tenderly, only that he wanted to whisper words of adoration in her ear before drifting off to sleep and, no doubt, to dream of her.

Suddenly, on the companionway stairs, he stopped abruptly, his hand gripped hard on the railing, one foot on one step and another on the next. He listened, incredulous, as he heard Cleo's voice drifting out from her cabin—and Cleo's laughter! "—and there I was with my pants down, see? Well, when a girl's caught like that, what can she do? So I said to him—"

Shamus cringed. Numb with the shock of it, he turned and crept swiftly back up the stairs. As he closed the door at the top of the companionway, Cleo's laughter swept over him, drenching him in the bitter acid of humiliation.

Poor Shamus! He had learned how to handle a ship, how to cope with men, how to go into physical danger coolly and with courage and intelligence. But he had never learned how to evaluate his own hypersensitiveness, or how to avoid his instinctive tendency to interpret any ambiguity as some sort of slur upon himself. To him, Cleo's words, and her laughter, meant only one possible thing. She was telling about it—was even repeating their words of love and desire—was laughing at him. . . . Was it to Doc? Whitey? Jim? Jodo? What did it matter? The bitter essential of the event lay in the realization that this was all it meant to her—something to amuse her, a triumph, something she could talk and laugh about, as one would tell a funny story, before even the night was yet spent. Nor did it occur to him,

who was the acme of fairness in his dealings with men, how unfair it was for him to jump to so quick a conclusion on such scanty evidence.

For the rest of the night he tossed restlessly awake on his pallet, sleep far from him. Given, in moments of deepest depression, to self-immolation (a habit which betrayed the English puritanism of his ancestry), now, in his bitter pain, he accused himself on so many counts that his mutilated self-respect was in tatters. He had become sodden with drunkenness, had allowed himself to do meaninglessly that which had dignity only when coupled with deep meaning, he had been fool enough to be deceived by a woman whose brazenness had seemed like forthrightness to him, in that drunken moment, and who was proving her unbelievable shallowness even now by her recounting, and laughing at, the event. But worst of all, he had somehow thrown away, by his inconsidered and impulsive act, something which had been of infinite preciousness—his right to think of Ganice as he had been thinking of her. What meaning had his repeated declarations of devotion to her when he could cast aside the thought of her so easily? And because Cleo had shared the event with him, he castigated her along with himself—as much now for her participation, since it meant so little to her, as for her seeming derision of it later.

A strict disciplinarian with his crew, Shamus had long been accustomed to exercising even stricter discipline with himself. Swiftly on the heels of his recrimination came his decision—a stern and almost inevitable thing—as though he were a priest prescribing penance in the confessional. He had undertaken this trip in the hope of seeing Ganice again—even though, in his inmost heart, he had known that the visit was hopeless, and a compromise with the determination he had earlier inflicted upon himself. Well, he would avoid Father Kirshner's mission as though it were the plague. He would not put in there. He would hurry this trip as much as he could, get back to Rabaul quickly, and sail for England as soon as possible. All that he had now of Ganice—that one golden moment with her, the Dresden china vase, and the eternal memory—was all that he would ever have. How then to put his plan into effect?

Three days' sail ahead of them was the mouth of the Ramu

River. Two days or more farther along the coast was the mouth of the Sepik—their originally planned objective. And between the two lay Father Kirshner's mission. His teeth clamped shut tightly as he remembered Mr. Gibson's suggestion: "Why go up that particular river at all? All rivers look the same—particularly if you haven't seen them before. You could choose any safe river—"

But Shamus wasn't thinking of the kind of safety Mr. Gibson meant. To be sure, there were elements to be considered in that category. In the Ramu it was just as easy to get stuck on a mud bank as in the Sepik, but here the similarity between the two rivers ceased. In the Ramu one waited for the tide to wash the boat free, in the Sepik a grounded boat immediately became a target for the natives—tall, headbinding head hunters, inimical to all strangers, and especially to white men, warlike, crafty, and treacherous. Hidden in the thick mangroves of the river banks, a sudden shower of spears and arrows usually gave the first and only warning of their presence. These things were true, but they were not the considerations which weighed in Shamus's decision. They would serve merely as his excuse when he explained his plan. He knew that the nearer they came to Father Kirshner's mission, the more powerful would become his urge to put in there and see Ganice, and his course, now clear, precluded that.

Slowly he rose from his shakedown and went to the ancient refrigerator, where he tenderly removed the package containing the Dresden china vase, unwrapped the old shirt which was about it, and gently put the vase on the table. Swartz would want to go to shore today to photograph the natives—though Shamus would be glad if he could steer him away from the idea, so that they could speed the trip that much more—and if, and when, he did, Shamus would gather flowers to put in the vase, and gain what comfort and peace he could from them. Meanwhile he would have it ready so that his care of it would not be so conspicuous later.

He walked slowly forward, his face grim and worn, and was surprised to find that Swartz was already up, leaning against the rail and looking shoreward.

"Morning, Cap," the little man called cheerily. "Some party you gave us last night."

"Quite," Shamus answered stiffly. He was thinking that it might have been Doc to whom he had heard Cleo talking in the night.

Ebullient, as always, Doc seemed not to notice the cool rebuff.

"When'll we be ready to sail, Cap?"

"Whenever you like," Shamus said. Perhaps his plan to hurry the trip was going to be easier of execution than he had hoped. "We could be under way in an hour." But then his sense of orderly procedure and fairness overcame his desire to press the point. "But the headbinders you wanted to photograph?"

Swartz waved a hand deprecatingly. "That was mostly talk. I hate head hunters, and I only hope I never have to meet one. Whitey and Jim got all the photographs we need right here yesterday when you were getting ready for our dinner." He came closer to Shamus and his voice dropped to a confidential tone. "I might as well level with you right now, Cap, because I'll probably have to later. Remember getting your permits and clearances in Rabaul before we left? Remember I had certain letters to the Governor and so on?"

Shamus nodded.

"And do you remember how easy it all was? Well, there must have been a reason, don't you think? Okay, there was. I'm supposed to be shooting a motion-picture film. I am. Sure, I've got a sequence to shoot with Cleo and Jodo when we get on location. That's on the level. A lot of stuff's already been shot for the show in Hollywood. The sequence we get here with native and jungle background will be cut in when we get back. No hurry about that, though. We can shoot it any time—when we get settled for a few days in a nice comfortable spot. But actually I'm doing something else a damn sight more important—for my government, in co-operation with yours. You can check the assignment when we get back to Rabaul. I don't want to talk about it more than I have to, but I can say this. The Australian government and Uncle Sam figure that one day there might be a war around these parts. If there is they both want to know what the country looks like, because neither of 'em know now. I think maybe you can believe that—your Admiralty Charts, for instance, aren't a hell of a lot of help to you, are they? Apart from giving you a general idea you're in the Southern Pacific?"



Shamus smiled. "If I couldn't see a few coconut trees, sometimes I'd doubt that—from the charts."

"Exactly. But I could show you a Japanese chart of Rabaul Harbor with not only every coconut marked on it but practically how ripe it is!"

"Japanese?"

"Certainly, who else do you think's interested in New Guinea—the Zulus? We don't know how much the Japs know about the New Guinea coast, but it must be plenty."

"Do you want to take soundings too?"

"No—just want to photograph coastal topography—the Navy'll send someone else for the rest. You must have wondered why Jim and Whitey were taking all that footage of coastlines, well, that's it—basic preliminary stuff that can be fitted into the Naval surveys later. But we've got to get some real detailed stuff around the river mouths. That'll take a little time. And while we're set up for that, we can shoot the sequence for the show, see?"

He chuckled at Shamus's expression. "Hell of a guy for a job like this, aren't I? The nearest I ever came to going to sea before this was working on 'Moby Dick.' We made the picture in a tank out in the studio backyard—even then I got seasick."

Shamus nodded and thanked him for the confidence. "Do the rest know the whole story?"

Swartz shook his head. "Jimmie and Whitey, yes. But not Cleo and Jodo. Might as well publish it in the Tokyo papers as tell that kid Jodo."

Shamus scowled thoughtfully. "You put me in an embarrassing position, Mr. Swartz. I had planned to tell you this morning that, for reasons of safety, I felt it best that we should put in at the Ramu rather than the Sepik. This, however, somewhat alters the situation—"

Mr. Swartz shook his head. "It really doesn't make a lot of difference, Cap," he explained amiably. "The Ramu will do just as well for a starting point. I can work north from there, as easy as south from the Sepik."

Shamus nodded gravely. "Very well. We shall get underway at once and breakfast under sail." He went forward to give the necessary orders.

Meanwhile, up the companionway to the poop deck, came Cleo. She had slept beautifully, during the short time left to her after they had come back to the ship, as soon as she had been able to get rid of Doc. He had come to her cabin and held her up awhile to be sure. But you could never get sore at Doc. He was such a good old guy. And she knew that, liking Shamus as much as he did, he had come in the friendliest of all motives—probably to give her an opportunity to tell him, if there was anything to tell and she wanted to, and, if she were ready to reveal that there was anything serious between her and Shamus, to congratulate her warmly out of his real affection for them both. But about this thing which had happened to her she felt a reticence which was somewhat new to her.

Shamus, from the first, had been something different from the other men who had been in her life. And what had happened the night before—well there was something about it which she wasn't yet quite able to put her finger on. It wasn't like other events of the past, which, on the surface, might seem similar. They had been something apart and separate and of little importance. But this had not been a thing she could separate from life. It had been part of a context, and could not be thought about without thinking, too, about everything that mattered to her—and there was more that mattered to Cleo than anyone looking at her in the ordinary ways of her life might guess. This was something she couldn't take lightly. To be sure, in the early days on the ship, she would have welcomed Shamus to her cabin and subjected him to the baffling love routine in which alternate denial and invitation were but the entertaining prelude to delicious yielding—lightly, without much thought of any deeper meanings. But as time went on, the whole thing had taken on a different aspect, and last night—well, while she was not ready yet to put it into words, she knew that she had found in Shamus something for which she had instinctively been searching all her life, something which she wanted to keep forever, something which would make all of her restlessness and blind attacks on convention vanish.

But it was nothing about which she could talk. And so, when Doc came in, she had quickly steered their conversation into light commonplaceness, making occasion to tell him of an inane

happening which took place on a beach party at Santa Monica a year before. Half of it was made up out of whole cloth at that, but it sufficed to give Doc a hint and he had taken himself off as soon as she had told her ridiculous story.

Now, her first waking thought was Shamus. Swiftly making her toilet, with especial care for her hair, she had slipped on a pair of slacks and a waist and gone silently up the companion-way. Perhaps she would find him still asleep and could wake him in a way that would express the hidden tenderness she was feeling just then.

But, instead of Shamus, she found a deserted poop deck, with his shakedown carefully made up, and the Dresden china vase standing on the table—the mystery, the inanimate thing which some time ago she had recognized as, in some strange way, a challenge to her. She could have sworn that it had not been there the day before. What did it mean? Why had he brought it out from its careful concealment just then?

Slowly, thoughtfully, she walked to the table and picked it up, turning it over in her hands. Then her fingers gripped it hard as a sudden, inexplicable feeling of desolation swept over her. She started and turned swiftly as she heard a step behind her. But it wasn't Shamus. It was Jodo, who, his hair touseled and his eyes still heavy with sleep, was slouching toward her.

"What are you doing up so early?" she asked crossly. "Why can't you stay out of sight?"

"I awake from dreams of thee, in the first sweet sleep of night," he quoted raucously. "How'd it go, kid? Is he any good, or as much a ham horizontal as he is vertical?"

Cleo's face flushed with rage, but with an effort she controlled herself, determined not to be demeaned by being drawn into any sort of discussion of the night before with Jodo.

"You'd better go back to bed," she said shortly. "You're talking through your hat."

"Oh yeah?" Jodo sneered. "Listen, kid, if you think I don't know what went on under that tree last night—"

He was stopped not only by the swift look of fighting rage which swept over Cleo's face, but by her words, and her uplifted arm.

"You filthy, spying bastard," she said, in a low, tense voice

which only Jodo could hear, "if you say another word about that, I swear I'll murder you, and I mean it this time." Just then Shamus strode aft and came up behind her, but she neither saw nor heard him, nor had he heard her words. "Get out!" she screamed at Jodo, and raising her right hand in which she clutched the Dresden china vase, she was about to hurl it at his head when she felt a strong hand grip her wrist, and another take the vase from her hand. Whirling, she saw the white drawn look of Shamus's face.

"If you had thrown that," he snapped, "I think I would have thrown you over the side. I'd be grateful if you would stay out of my quarters."

Without looking at her again, he went to the refrigerator, carefully wrapped the vase and put it away.

"We're about to sail," he said, impersonally. "Breakfast will be a little late."

Then he went forward, where the anchor winch had begun its clanking cadence, accompanied by the familiar chant of the chainmen. Soon the cry came back clear and sharp: "Anchor straight up and down!"

"Ahead—slow," Shamus bade the helmsman curtly. Watching him or listening to him, no one could have guessed the tearing storm of emotion which was still sweeping through him.

"Oi, Taubada—ahead slow."

"West by South, a half west. Here—give me that wheel."

If, instead of taking the wheel, he had at that moment gone to his cabin, as he had started to do in the night, he would have found, to his ununderstanding surprise, Cleo stretched prone on his bed, weeping into her pillow with an uncontrollable abandonment to hopeless, bewildered grief which she had not known since she was seventeen years of age.

### *Chapter Thirteen: THE STORM*

EXCERPT from the official ship's log: *Dec. 23rd, 1930. At sea. Lat. 142°, Long. 89°. Hazy ahead. No landfall made yet. Cloudy water indicates Ramu River Spill. No wind. Proceeding under power. Preparing small Christmas celebration. Barometer normal.*

Shamus's last notation was unusual. Unless the daily barometer check gave a markedly abnormal reading, no comment was called for in the log. But something intangible, the heavy stillness over the water, the warm sultry morning, the sun, mist-hidden in a thick morning haze, made him uneasy. Oftentimes strange and nameless things will trouble the subconscious of those who follow the sea, even when instruments give assurance to the contrary.

Thin wisps of cloud idled white and foamy along the horizon, drifting and merging with the haze. Overhead, ruffled gray clouds flew along swiftly on the wings of an upper wind. These peculiar weather conditions had prevailed since leaving Siassi, three days before.

They had been a trying three days. An air of tension hung over the ship—probably generated by the strange atmosphere which Cleo's behavior created. During the whole of the day of their sailing she had stayed in her cabin, refusing the food which Shamus had bade one of the Kanakas take her. And, when she had appeared on deck the following day, all of her brashness which marked the earlier part of the voyage was gone. There were no wisecracks, no attempts at exhibitionism, as she ate in silence or sat reading a book. She spoke when spoken to, and, while she did not seem directly to be avoiding Shamus, treated him as impersonally as the rest—from Swartz to Tikis, the tame pig. And she stayed scrupulously away from Shamus's quarters under the poop-deck awning. Even Jodo seemed awed by her behavior, and lapsed into what was for him an unheard-of quietness.

To add to the depressing atmosphere, the engine, an old-fashioned, semi-Diesel type, was misbehaving in spite of careful mothering, the hot-bulb cylinder heads constantly overheating. As a result, the *Maski*, no sailor in light winds, was lumbering along at a sparse three, or at best four, knots.

Shamus closed the log book, sighed, and started forward. Never had he wished so heartily that a voyage might be finished.

"White water, ho!"

The cry came from the lookout and Shamus quickly sprang into the ratlines. Skinning aloft to the crosstrees, he peered ahead and then muttered a soft imprecation. A few miles ahead four

great lines of curling breakers crashed in toward the shore. The bar across the mouth of the Ramu was angry.

Visible for many miles, a great reddish-colored wash comes boiling out to sea from the mouth of the Ramu. It is mud, scooped up by the tremendous currents that swirl forth from the belly of this mighty river, fed in turn by a hundred lesser streams.

Down at the vast mouth, stretching from bank to bank, there is an enormous mud bar, shallow and treacherous, with lines of breakers continuously curving over it, sometimes large, sometimes small, depending upon weather conditions.

Shamus studied the prospect and cursed softly again. Across that bar and through those mighty breakers he must take his ship. He had hoped for a still bar—and considering the flat, oily sea and absence of wind there had been no reason to expect otherwise. But something, some submarine upheaval perhaps, the giant river flooding, perhaps the approach of the nameless disturbance he had sensed earlier, made an immediate crossing a dangerous undertaking.

The only alternative was far from comforting—he could heave to and wait for the bar to subside. But with an engine liable to break down at any moment, and possible bad weather—He slid down the ratlines and poked his head below for a glance at the barometer. What he saw made him jump down the hatch to tap the face of the instrument. No, it hadn't suddenly gone mad. In a mere few hours the black hand had fallen in full quarter of its entire swing! *Stormy*, it read.

That settled all doubts. Hell or high water, breakers or ripples, the ship must force the bar, and in a hurry, to find a lee from whatever the elements held in store.

Tulare was waiting for him at the top of the hatch.

"Break out heavy line," he barked sharply.

"Already break out, Taubada. And joined." The big native wore a grin of self-satisfaction from having anticipated the unusual command, although his tense manner showed full comprehension of the danger ahead.

"Good—pay it out astern." Shamus gave him a wallop on the shoulder, half shove and half camaraderie in face of the common danger ahead.

He was going to employ an old-time trick, a wrinkle from the days when full-rigged ships traversed the bars of river mouths under sail alone. By dropping his thickest and heaviest line over the stern and letting it stream out to its full length, the weight and drag of the line in the water would have the effect of keeping the vessel stern-on to the following seas, thus lessening the risk of a comber breaking over her broadside. Caught on the crest of one of those giant breakers she would be helpless. Stern and rudder might be lifted high out of the water and all steering control lost. Then, as she careened forward over the treacherous shallows without the heavy rope dragging astern to keep her headed straight, she might at any moment take a sudden disastrous sheer to port or starboard. Capsize could easily follow.

Anxiously he peered ahead, trying to spot some inundations in the giant waves. There were none. Overhead the sky, heavy-hazed since morning, was now much darker, an ominous stillness in the hot, heavy air. But the gulls still wheeled planing overhead, their raucous, plaintive cries breaking the steady swish of water along the ship's side.

Slightly reassured by the birds' presence, he went aft to see the passengers. They were grouped by the rail, staring with varying expressions at the approaching line of breakers.

"Are we going to go through those, or what?" Whitey asked the question with a nervous laugh.

Shamus nodded. "We might get wet, so I'd suggest you all put on oilskins. I'm also having some life lines rigged back here. I'd like you all to tie them around yourselves." He paused, half expecting some protest. None came and he added reassuringly, "There's no danger—only if we take a sea aboard. Probably won't, but if it happens, be sure to hang on to something solid. Perhaps—" he glanced at Cleo "—it would be better if you went below."

"Perhaps," she said with a lift of one brow, "it wouldn't. I prefer to be up here."

Shamus didn't argue. If by mischance something went wrong, it might be just as well to have everyone on deck. Without a word he took the wheel, feet braced firmly apart.

Already the ship was rising on a mountainous swell, a bare 50 yards from the first line of breakers.

"Hold ship!" He ordered the engine to neutral, calculating the exact second to begin his run.

Soon another great wave rose and started to roll forward. It passed beneath the ship, curved in a giant arc, and then pounded in mountainous foam toward the shore.

Then he snapped the quiet order, "Hard ahead!"

Slowly, all too slowly, the little ship gathered momentum. He threw a quick glance astern. By following this first wave as closely as possible he had hoped to outrun the succeeding ones. But now he could see there was no chance. The wave was mounting too fast—catching up. Ah, for a few more revs, one little extra bit of speed.

"Full ahead!"

Opening the laboring engine full up, he knew was risking a breakdown. But it was a chance that had to be taken. Tensely he heard the throbbing boom of the motor smother to nothing in the mounting sea astern. There was a limit to steel. It was racing hard, too hard. All right so far, though.

Now the stern began to rise and he gripped the wheel hard, concentrating every faculty. Not daring to look astern, alongside he could feel the gigantic reddish-tinged wave catch up and begin mounting beneath the ship.

She surged up and forward. The reverberating hammer of the driving engine, the flattening beat of wind pressure increasing, a breathless sensation of hopeless, headlong propulsion, and now she was riding the crest, bow way up in the air, planing along alone like a surf boat hanging perilously suspended upon nothing.

Then came the sickening downward plunge as her 80 tons dropped into the trough with a great wallop. He caught his breath, praying that her keel might not crash aground to shiver into driftwood.

Again came the plunging race forward on the crest of another giant wave, white spray spuming off to both sides. Shamus, the taut lines of his body showing through the white ducks, soaked and clinging to his skin, the spray running in little rivulets down his face, held her bow steady and dead ahead, ready on the instant to anticipate and check her every impulse to take a sheer.

Once a great following sea caught and pooped the vessel,



breaking green abaft her quarter and flooding the amidships. But she shook it off and rode bravely on, until at last the lines of combers lay safely astern and she sailed smoothly into the calm waters of the river mouth.

With the sudden slackening of the tension Shamus threw his head back and laughed aloud. "Here, Tulare, grab the wheel. Shall we go back and do it over again?"

The boy grinned back at him. "'Nother time, Taubada."

Now Shamus chose his anchorage, hurriedly but with care. The expected weather was obviously approaching from the north; already black, rolling clouds off in that direction filled half the sky.

A little crescent-shaped cove looked fairly snug. It was rocky, with not much room to swing. Patches of reddish sand showed here and there where the shore ran up a sheer cliff on one side and thick jungle on the other. It offered the best and only protection. This was no time to pick and choose.

The anchor splashed into six fathoms of muddy water. Instantly he ordered all awnings and loose gear stripped off, extra gaskets bound on the furled sails, and the spare anchor broken out. Then he coned ship again.

Above, the dark, sullen sky gave as yet no definite sign. But ashore one of Neptune's most vivid warning signals didn't escape him—the gulls. Ruffling their feathers, changing from one leg to another, they huddled in groups on the rocks ashore, squawking with the sharp uneasy note that isn't lost upon a seaman's ears. One at a time they waddled down the rocks and sipped the salt water, seeming to taste of it. Then, straining a neck to the sky, each one voiced the high desolate cry of alarm and warning that only the sea birds voice—and then only when the ocean, their home, is about to erupt.

To the passengers, anxious to set foot on shore after three long days at sea, Shamus's preparations seemed overdone. After the breathtaking thrill of crossing the bar, anything further could only be anticlimax. A scratch midday meal found them seated around the table on the poop deck, bored to death with inactivity.

"Ah, nuts!" exclaimed Jodo, listlessly aggravating Hedda by poking her with a spoon. "So it's going to rain. So we get wet. Couldn't some of us go ashore for about an hour? I'd like to take

a gun and try to shoot something. Maybe I could shoot a wild pig or a crocodile or something."

"Don't see how we could get much wetter than we did coming over those breakers," said Whitey. "Say—do we have to go back through that, or what?"

"I'd like to go for a walk," announced Cleo. "I've been cooped up here so long I feel like stamping on somebody's instep. Tulare can take us in the longboat and be back in a little while. Jodo, please leave that poor bird alone."

"This is how I can tell if she's going to lay an egg. If she bites, she's not going to—if she's *going* to, you can poke her and she doesn't give a damn."

"Well, stop it anyway. Come on, let's go ashore."

"The longboat hasn't been put in the water yet," replied Shamus. "The crew is eating—they haven't had anything to eat since dawn this morning and besides—"

He broke off abruptly. Even while speaking he had felt the subtle change come over the sea's face—a sudden, minute change in wind direction, a cold draft of air, light as a zephyr at first. But from the south! It brought him quickly to his feet, searching the horizon.

"What's the matter?"

Shamus made no reply. Off to the south the smooth waters inside the bar had suddenly burst into white puffs of cotton. Here it came. The expected—but not from the north. A blow out of the south could turn his snug cove into a nasty trap! He would have to get the ship out of there—and quick!

"Stand by anchor! Start up engine!"

Shamus rarely raised his voice, and when he did, only for the purpose of making it carry to a desired point. But now the bel-lowed command, bringing the crew tumbling out of the foc'sle hatch on the double, held a note that made everyone stare at him in surprise.

The half-cold engine turned over with a weary rumble, coughing and spitting in protest. Anxiously he listened to its broken cadence. If it should desert them now—

"Heave up!"

The winch had just started to grind when it hit—the prelude. Little sharp gusts at first, spurting unevenly, followed by a fine

chilly spray that bit into the skin. Almost immediately a stiff, cold blast began breezing a high whistle through the topmast shrouds. The ship stiffened hard up against her cable. Now he didn't dare order the anchor up—not in the teeth of a sudden blast of this sort, and a spitting engine.

"Belay there! Now slack off chain!"

Then the rain came. It came in a blinding sheet that obscured the deck and merged with the driven salt spray, drenching and stinging like gravel. Darkness fell as quickly as if a curtain had been drawn over the heavens. The *Maski* heaved and strained against her chain as the mounting waves clawed at her with a giant grip.

As if by the wave of a magic wand, the little cove astern had become a seething caldron. Waves were now sheet spume—topped combers, crashing mountainously ashore and rumbling ever higher up the face of the cliff. In the pounding thunder even the deep boom of the engine was lost in the wave troughs.

He changed his mind suddenly. The ship could not stay alive here. She must be slipped out of the cove at all costs—and in a terrible hurry.

"Heave up!"

The wind seized the shouted words and flung them away, filling up his mouth like a bag. Amplified a hundred times, his voice would never reach up forward.

"Ahead—hard!" he shouted down to the engine room. If the engine possessed enough power to drive her forward against the gale, perhaps he could fight his way out into the wide river mouth. Out there it might be possible to heave to, with the engine running under storm trysail and sea anchor, and ride the storm out.

Suddenly a heavy jolt shook the ship. She had come up sharp against the anchor chain. With the loss of what little headway she carried, she began falling off rapidly.

"Hold that bow up!" thundered Shamus at the helmsman, although he could see the man's every muscle straining as he fought the wheel desperately.

There came a second heavy jolt. From up forward the faint protesting grind of the anchor winch at work fled by, carried in the high shrill of the wind. Tulare, good man, must be acting

on his own judgment, heaving up without waiting for orders.

Slowly, fighting her head around foot by foot, the *Maski* came up over the anchor again. Break the anchor out, that was the main concern. Never mind heaving up—the hook could be allowed to drag while he fought his way out to the cove.

The third jolt was so savage it nearly flung him to the deck. A few more of those, the thought flashed through his mind as he clung to the screaming shrouds, and the whole bow would tear out of the boat. But at least the vicious jolt should have broken the anchor free.

He waited. Again the vessel heeled and slid off into the trough. Again she came up against the chain, and again there came the heavy jarring blow. That settled it—the anchor must be fouled, jammed fast in the rocks beneath.

The situation called for no decision now, for no alternatives offered. To try to slip the anchor and run out of the cove would be to court certain disaster, so fierce was the force of the gale. The only course left was to drop his spare hook, hope that the wind wouldn't increase, and if it did, trust in God that together both anchors would hold the ship.

He started forward, leaning far into the howling wind, clawing his way along the rigging. The gale's force flattened the hair straight down on his head, and he could see it snatching wickedly at the tightly furled sails. Thank heaven he had ordered those extra gaskets on—one loose binding and the canvas beneath would tear to shreds in a second.

In the blinding darkness he could barely distinguish the crouching figures of the winch crew struggling with the chain. Ah, Tulare had taken no chances—already he could see the thick manila line of the spare anchor pointing straight down into boiling water, stretched taut as a bowstring.

As he leaned over to inspect the line, the bow suddenly fell away from under him. The ship hit the bottom of the trough and a heavy sea came crashing green over the foc'sle, submerging and blotting out everything. As she reared up into the air again, sheets of lashing spray followed, driven so hard he was forced to seize the nearest forestay. It was steel cable, twanging now in the gale like the eerie bass notes of a great harp.

"Anchors holding. No drag!"

Tulare was yelling in his ear. Not yet, he thought, but if the gale kept up its present force—"Keep two men on watch—all the time!" he shouted back.

Bracing himself against the foc'sle-hatch combing, he began a grim calculation. There was no way of foretelling how long the storm would last. It might blow over in a few hours or blow for days. How long would the anchors hold? That was the point. Whether they held or not, there was absolutely nothing to be done about it—except hope, and pray. The time for an attempt to get the passengers ashore was past. One look into the uproarious darkness astern told him the futility of such a thought. In that maelstrom nothing could live.

He caught a faint rumble from the engine aft, still pounding wearily ahead. Might as well ease it off. Apart from the imminent possibility of a breakdown the meager spurts of headway it gave the boat were causing both anchor lines to jerk and snap. A steady strain would be more effective now.

Then the blow fell. As the *Maski* dipped her nose deep in the sea, heaving it high up in the air again, there came a curious grating sound. And following, almost lost in the screaming tumult, a relatively inaudible crack.

The anchor chain—instantly he knew it had broken! Knew it even before he felt the ship heel over sharply and veer off to port. He held his breath, waiting, hoping for her to come up against the spare anchor.

Amazingly the rope line held. . . .

As the *Maski* righted herself, the tough hemp fiber stretched and strained like a giant length of elastic, drawn so taut it seemed a full inch less in thickness but it held.

In mute suspense he and Tulare stared at it, the same unspoken thought running through the minds of both—how long before it parted?

On an impulse Tulare tore the drenched cotton shirt off his back and began wrapping it around the rope as a chafing pad. The line was stabbing out into the water, stiff as a pole. Suddenly realizing the futility of his action, the big Kanaka let the cloth fly out of his hand and began shaking his head hopelessly.

Only one course remained. Cupping his hands Shamus shouted into the boy's ear. "An ax! Stand by and we'll try to

make a run for it. Cut the line when I pass the word!"

Tulare nodded and Shamus started aft. He meant to try to get an extra bit of power out of the engine. Half crawling, half running, the force of the wind fairly blew him down the deck. Beneath the short companionway leading to the poop deck he found a vague form squatting drenched in several inches of washing water. It was Jodo.

"Grab a life belt!" Shamus yelled at him. "Put it on!"

The boy nodded. He was protecting something under his shirt and briefly Shamus caught a surprising glimpse of a ludicrous, bedraggled head—the parrot Hedda.

Hauling himself up on the poop deck, he bumped into Cleo. She was standing huddled against the shrouds, gripping them with both hands. Wide-eyed and pale, she was making a gallant effort to hide her fear.

Before he could utter a word, it happened. Deadened by the wind he heard the sound he had been straining his ears for—a sudden sharp report, like a muffled bullet shot.

As the rope parted, the wind seized the puny *Maski* with fiendish joy. Her head swung off and she started toward the rocks.

Shamus leaped for the girl and tried to drag her farthest away from the crash he knew must follow. But terror had given her a death-like grip. She was frozen to the shrouds.

The crash came. A giant sea lifted the vessel on high, held her suspended there for a moment, teetering on her beam ends, and hurled her down with a sickening shudder onto the rocks below. Then with wanton and unsatisfied malice it seized and swept her out to sea again.

The arm by which Shamus had been holding on to the shrouds was nearly jerked loose from its socket. Over the side the furious water boiled, pitch dark. A slender chance, but not to take it, to remain on the ship, was certain death.

"Over the side!" he shouted. "Jump!"

In the darkness and the blinding force of the driven spray he could hardly distinguish her—but he heard her sob. Again he tried to pry her hands loose from the rigging. She clung on with a strength that was amazing. He cast a futile look around, but could see no sign of a living soul. No time to look farther.

There came a moment of high suspense, as if for a brief second the elements, the god of destruction held his hand. Then he felt the vessel begin to waver—the receding comber on which she had been carried out was now about to send her crashing down on the rocks a second time.

For an instant the ship hung teetering, poised almost motionless upon its crest. There was only one thing to be done and Shamus did it.

The short hard blow took the girl squarely on the jaw and with a little moan she fell limp in his arms. He struggled to lift her over the rail, then flung himself together with her into the sea.

Striking out in blind desperation, his most vivid recollection was seeing the ship's stern, with its lettered gold legend, *MASKI, RABAU*L, tower overhead for a brief second. Then she plunged to her end.

The following wash of the same giant wave seized them. Struggling helplessly he felt himself lifted high on its crest, caught a brief flash of jagged rocks far beneath. Then they too were flung headlong into the abyss.

#### *Chapter Fourteen:* THE SURVIVORS

THE boy Alaman, picking and clawing his way along the rocky shore, stumbled upon a human form, lying sprawled face downward on a deposit of driftwood.

Giving the figure no more than a cursory glance, he continued on his way. Being of a primitive and therefore literal turn of mind, he was not moved to determine if life remained in it, or even its identity, although he was pretty sure of both.

Last night, after the storm had blown them up, it had been too dark to look, but this morning Tulare had told him to find the Taubada. Finding anybody else was therefore a mere manifestation of the coincidental.

Soon, by climbing atop the high barrier of flotsam piled up by the storm, he was able to command a view of the entire cove, and let his gaze wander along it at length, dwelling on every crevice where a body might be hidden. He was about to climb down and search farther when his eye was caught by something

—a break in a stretch of thick brush, at the far end of the beach.

To most eyes it would have been no more than commonplace, any one of a hundred such breaks caused naturally or by the storm. To his savage eyes, however, it could stand further investigation. He started skipping lightly over the driftwood.

The break was small, seemingly not large enough to admit the passage of a man's body, but to Alaman, versed from childhood in the reading of such signs, the story was as clear as the pages of a book. Looking at it closely, he knew the brush had been pushed apart lately.

Satisfied, he took a deep breath, cupped his hands, and sent a strange call echoing around the cove and into the dense jungle. "Hoooo-eee!"

The high-pitched, long-drawn-out cry died slowly away in the distance. He listened. Surprisingly an answering cry came back almost before the echo had died—and much closer than he had expected.

Parting the overhanging branches, he began picking his way swiftly through the undergrowth, stepping almost daintily to avoid thorns in his bare feet, and peering alertly to all sides.

The trail was crisscrossed with swamp waterways. At the end of it was a clearing in the jungle. About 50 or 60 yards in diameter at its farthest end stood three crude, lean-to huts, palm-thatched, three-sided structures—obviously a crude camping site for native fishermen or hunters.

In front of the middle one stood the Taubada, bedraggled and almost shirtless, and behind him the white woman.

"Taubada!" His broad face still immobile but black eyes shining with suppressed joy, the boy ran across the clearing and seized Shamus's hand, holding it between his own. "We thought you had died! This is good! Tulare—"

"Tulare is well?" Shamus said quickly.

"Well. Yes."

"And the others?"

The boy dug his toes into the earth in the embarrassment of happy incoherence. "Our skins have holes, all of us, but—ah, no," he corrected himself quickly, "we have not yet found the young Taubada, and one lies dead upon the beach—the old one."



"Swartz?"

Alaman nodded. "Dead." He paused and added fortuitously, "He should be—his skull is cracked in half. Are you hungry?"

Shamus shook his head and glanced at Cleo. She rose and came to him. "What did he say?"

"Mr. Swartz—he's dead."

"Doc! Oh—"

"Everyone else is all right."

Silently she looked down at the ground, then turned quickly and went inside the hut. Shamus followed; so did Alaman. Inside it was dark after the bright sunlight and Alaman blinked. Then he saw that another figure lay upon the ground on a crude bed of brushwood.

He looked curiously at the small form. It was the first time he had seen the young Taubada without the round pieces of glass he wore in front of his eyes. And but for the fact that his breathing was discernible, the young one looked as if he were dead too—a matter of extreme indifference to Alaman, one way or the other. The boy's face was gray and haggard with pain, and he lay very still.

Alaman leaned over him briefly and nodded. Sucking wind in through his teeth he said: "He will die," making the announcement in the same tone he would have used to say *It's going to rain*.

"Perhaps," replied Shamus.

"How is he damaged?"

"His hip—the bones are broken. And inside also he has great pain. I wish I could help it."

"There is a plant that grows in the bush," said Alaman. "When chewed, it kills pain. I will look. But Tulare must know you live. Then all us will come to this place to camp—at present many mosquitoes eat the meat off our bones. This is a good place. I go?"

Shamus nodded. "Go. Tell Tulare to send two for the old one—he must be planted in the ground. Wait—"

The boy stopped. Shamus said hesitantly, as if almost afraid to ask the question. "What did the sea do to *Maski*?"

Alaman paused and dug up more soil with his toes. Trying to find adequate words of expression with a vocabulary as limited

as his was not easy. "The sea," he said slowly, "ate *Maski* up—every piece. Nothing is left. But the sea was also good—we found the longboat. It has a hole—not big. Only two of us have knives—they are not enough. I go?"

"Go," said Shamus.

As he watched the boy disappear swiftly in the jungle he thought grimly of their plight. Eight Kanakas, and with Swartz dead, five whites; one so terribly injured his death was to be expected. How were they to sustain themselves? Without arms, food would not be easy to find for thirteen people. And of the friendly coconuts on which a man can live almost indefinitely—no sign.

That was far from being the worst. What of the character of the local tribe whose existence and proximity was indicated by the lean-to huts? Even if superficially well disposed, once they learned the castaways had nothing in the world but a couple of knives with which to defend themselves, they would unquestionably run true to type and turn ugly. Suddenly Shamus remembered, and his face set in grim lines. Anitok! This was not far from the spot at which he had gone ashore before, only to lose all of his crew save Tulare to the ruthless little savage who, Father Kirshner told him, now absurdly claimed this strip of territory for his own. But Anitok's village, he knew, lay far inland, in the mountains. With luck, it might be a few days before the Pygmy raider learned of their arrival. During that precious time they would have to work fast. But if Anitok came, bluff—that was the only defense.

The longboat was holed, Alaman had said—but how badly? With only two knives with which to work, repairing any kind of hole sounded an almost hopeless task. But supposing it were possible, then what? Help must be sought, but where? Not only for Jodo, but all of them—and the longboat would safely hold four or five at best. The bar had to be recrossed too. That might be managed; perhaps he could slip around one end of it close to shore—the longboat's shallow draft might permit that.

Even so, for thirteen people to put to sea in a flimsy, 16-foot craft, without charts and as yet no food or weapons, added up to a desperate situation. Where would be the nearest—ah, the thought came to him at once—Father Kirshner.

He made a swift calculation. Father Kirshner's mission could not be more than a 100 miles away. If they made it in time, the Father would certainly know how to set the boy's bones. Perhaps he could also take care of the internal injury, whatever it was. With a good fair wind—

He smiled grimly. What price determination now? Was some powerful fate driving him back to Ganice, in spite of every effort of will which he could make to take himself away from her? He must try to put that thought from his mind. There was a life—and perhaps several—at stake here. And he believed that they could make it, by dint of hard work, skill, and, above all, resolution.

Suddenly his flight of optimism took a nose dive. The long-boat's sail was always removed and treated for mildew—it would have been lost with the *Maski*. But oars—thank God for his standing order that oars were to be lashed inside her at all times. All right—a sail must be contrived—out of pandanus leaves, like those on native canoes, and a jury mast stepped. It would be efficient only for a following wind, but one had to leave something to luck. And if pandanus could not be found, then some other fronds, matted and weaved, could—no, had to be—made to serve.

"Shamus, he wants to talk to you."

Engrossed in thought, the sound of the name on her lips gave him a mild shock. She had only used it once before—that night—but now it sounded odd, like being addressed by a stranger for the first time—or by a dear familiar whom one had not previously recognized. Amazing, he thought as he looked at her; even a cyclone, complete disaster, couldn't wreck that air of cool distinction.

Her clothes were ripped and torn and she was shoeless. But such was the superb elegance, the proud grace of her carriage, that one was only conscious of the slightly weary, hands-in-pocket stance. Except for the once gay vestiges of bright crimson nail polish, not even bare feet, on which she trod daintily high up on her toes, looked surprising.

She looked down at her slacks expressively and smiled at him with rueful nonchalance, like one down-at-heels aristocrat sharing an amusing confidence with another in similar distress.

"Kind of shot, aren't they? I was going to whittle them down to shorts. But I remembered what you said about mosquitoes."

"You were wise." He remembered having once delivered a lecture on board concerning the dangers of fever-bearing mosquitoes, warning everyone to leave as little as possible of their person exposed. At the time it had been intended as a subtle rebuke to Cleo.

"You'd better go see Jodo—he wants you."

As Shamus stooped down to enter the shelter he could hear the heavy respiration. The boy's appearance shocked him. All the color had drained from the dry lips, although from head to foot the rest of the small body was damp with sweat. He seemed to be having great difficulty with his breathing. He had half opened his eyes as Shamus entered. Now he stared up with a hazy expression.

"My glasses," he said in a choking whisper. "I can't see. . . ." His lips quivered and he drew his breath in short jerks. And as he tried to move, the thin little face became suddenly gaunt and drawn with pain. "Goddammit—I can't see."

A wave of compassion overcame Shamus. Taking one of the boy's thin hands in his own, he said warmly: "Poor old chap—I know how it must hurt. Soon I hope we'll have something to stop it." Awkwardly, he searched for something more to say. "Anything you want? A drink of water?"

The boy made a slight negative indication with his head. "What for? I must have—played this scene forty times. They always want to give you water—jerks. . . ." The faint flutter of a smile trembled on his lips. "That's only because—it says so in the script. I'm not thirsty."

"Nothing I can do to make you feel better—more comfortable?"

Again the boy shook his head. "If you could—you'd be a magician. What happened to everybody?"

Briefly Shamus told him, omitting Mr. Swartz's death. It seemed unnecessary to mention it at the moment.

Jodo closed his eyes. "That's swell—it's a miracle. Too bad—about your boat. I know—how much you liked it. Poor Hedda—" He paused and made a little sound between a choke and a sob, and tears welled large between his closed lids. "She forgot

her wings were cut. She was trying to fly—in the water. . . .”

The voice was barely audible but his breathing seemed to have become easier. Suddenly he opened his eyes wide and said abruptly, “Know what tomorrow is?”

“Tomorrow?” Shamus shook his head.

“It’s Christmas. Think I’ll croak—Christmas Day?”

Before Shamus could make any sort of reply, the boy’s head slipped to one side, and leaning over quickly Shamus perceived that he had lapsed into unconsciousness again—Nature’s kindly solution, he realized, for pain too great for human endurance.

A miracle indeed, he thought as he looked at the small figure. In fact, a miracle any of them were alive.

His mind went back to that terrible moment in the pounding sea when he had seen the jagged rocks looming up far below the breakers and consigned himself to certain death.

How he and Cleo had escaped was one of those inexplicable freaks of circumstance. They should have been instantly crushed to pieces. Instead, the gigantic wave had flung them atop a kelp bed, uprooted and cast ashore by the storm. Although the crushing blow had pounded almost every ounce of breath out of his body, the big pile of weed had softened the impact enough to save them.

Numbed, crawling and sliding frantically, he had somehow dragged Cleo to safety, out of reach of the backwash.

Vividly he remembered his sensation when, on reaching the meager shelter of some beach brush and still dizzy, he was sure she was dead. She lay so still and lifeless, panic seized him. Strength, under the stimulus of a mortal fear, returned redoubled. Although the gale knocked him down once or twice he had staggered off frantically through the undergrowth, carrying her in his arms, but without the least idea where he was going or why. Only when she moaned in a weak voice something about “My jaw—” had rationality returned and cast out the crazing fear in his mind.

The little clearing and the shelter of the deserted hunting shacks had meant salvation too—from possible death from exposure. Brisk rubbing of limbs restored her at last.

In the gloom he could see her patting her jaw gingerly. “What did you hit me with?”

Shamus hesitated. "A fist," he said apologetically. "I had to. . . ."

"Yes, I know—because I was so scared I couldn't move. I wanted to do what you said but I *couldn't*. I couldn't think of a thing except hanging on. It was awful. You weren't afraid, were you?"

"Certainly I was," he said promptly. "But with fear there's a time element involved. I didn't have time to be afraid until—until we got ashore. . . . In the dark—you see, for a moment—" He broke off uncertainly.

"Yes? What?"

"Well—I thought at first you were—dead. It was terrible," he went on quickly. "I couldn't tell. . . . You were stone cold. That was fear."

For a long moment he could see, in the dim light, how steadfastly she was looking at him, and felt the firm hard pressure of her hand in his. But she didn't say anything.

Some hours later the storm abated a little; Shamus set out to search the beach. It was then that he found Jodo, lying crushed and unconscious beneath one of the *Maski's* timbers. There was no sign of anyone else.

Now, in the morning light of the next day, while they waited for Alaman to return with the others, Cleo was walking on the beach, while Shamus stayed behind, ready to hear Jodo, if the boy regained consciousness and wanted anything. Through the trail which led from the clearing he could see her walking slowly, her head down. Once he saw her stoop, pick up something, wipe the sand off it, and, after turning it over thoughtfully in her hands, put it carefully into a pocket of her slacks, and, turning, leave the beach and start back to the shack. He wasn't in the mood to be curious.

Just then Shamus noticed a small stack of dry, dead twigs and branches heaped inside the shack, where some fisherman, doubtless, had put them to keep dry—and surprisingly even the deluge had not wet them. Wanting to busy himself, he made a little pyramid of small sticks just outside the door, tore a bit of his handkerchief up for tinder, and was rubbing two sticks together as Cleo came up.

"What did you find on the beach?" he asked, without looking

at her.

"Just a bit of the *Maski*," she answered casually. "Nothing important. What on earth are you doing?"

"Making fire," he told her. "It's not hard. I've seen the aborigines do it in Australia. Natives here know how, too. All you have to do is rub like blazes—"

They were still rubbing when Alaman came back leading the others. Despairingly Shamus handed the two sticks to Tulare, who promptly threw them aside, and producing a small, tightly stoppered quinine bottle from the waist of his loin cloth, pulled the cork, took out a dry wax match, and lit it.

### *Chapter Fifteen:* THE EDGE OF DARKNESS

CLEO and Shamus, Whitey, and Jim buried Doc with their own hands, while the Kanakas stood in a silent circle at a respectful distance. The spot chosen was very beautiful—a small dell, almost adjoining the encampment.

At one end a shady grove of flowering casuarina trees grew, in the midst of wild shrubs and flowers. There were tall tree ferns, too, the gnarled fingers of wild orchids gripping their sides. And as though it were a backdrop, there was a cliff over which, hanging like some gigantic scarlet tapestry, grew a rich, tropical wonder—a huge D'Alberti's vine, its enormous earth-encrusted roots, as thick as a man's body, stretching up 100 feet or more, weaving over the cliffside in a fabulous profusion of indigo-scarlet flowers that looked like crimson buttercups.

A small wooden cross had been fashioned, with the simple epitaph *DOC* carved on it; a hollow gesture this: in all probability no eye able to comprehend would ever see it.

Wrapped in fern leaves, the battered body was lowered into the dank earth by ropes of plaited vines, and as the little band stood with bowed heads, Shamus, as was his duty, tried to recall those passages seamen have spoken over departing shipmates from time immemorial.

He searched his mind, but the solemn words escaped him. "We therefore commit this body to the deep—" was all he could remember, which hardly seemed adequate even when *deep* was changed to *earth*.

At length Cleo put a hand on his arm. "Let me," she said. "I think I know what he'd like. . . ."

Stooping down, she picked up a handful of earth and stood looking down into the grave for a moment.

"Well, Doc," she said softly at last, a faint smile curving the corners of her mouth. Her voice was low but strangely resonant in the dell. "You're a hell of a long way from Cincinnati, aren't you?"

She paused and let a little earth slide between her fingers into the grave. "And it looks like nobody knows how to pray. We ought to say something Jewish for you, I guess. But it doesn't matter, does it? We all know you were a right guy—and our pal. . . ."

She paused again and tossed a little more earth into the grave. "That's about all, isn't it, Doc? You don't want a lot of words, do you? You were a right guy—in just about every way it takes. We'll miss you." With that she tossed in the remaining handful of earth. "Sleep well, Doc."

Everyone filed away from the grave in silence, and Shamus, calling Tulare aside, told him to have the grave filled in.

Surprisingly, Jodo seemed to be holding his own. He lay listlessly upon the bed and spoke little, but the fever had diminished and there was less blood present in his stool, giving Shamus reason to hope the internal injuries, whatever their nature, were healing.

The improvement could only be attributed to the plant Alman had brought in from the jungle. When boiled into a thick soup, the hard and prickly leaves, about an inch long, looked like spinach. Shamus had been extremely dubious about its medicinal qualities and had only resorted to it upon the corroboration of Tulare. Kanaka superstitions, calling for the use of dead frogs, owl feathers, plants, herbs, and berries for almost every ill from a sore toe to leprosy were all too familiar to him. Some of the herbs undoubtedly possessed medicinal value, but were so inextricably confused with totem ideologies, black magic, and witchcraft, it was generally wiser to eschew them.

"No, not magic, Taubada," Tulare assured him. "This is a true medicine. It not only kills pain, it heals as well. It is good for many things."



"All right," Shamus said. "Mix it. But if harm comes to the boy, it is your trouble."

"Oi, Taubada," agreed Tulare. With supreme confidence he went off to begin preparing the brew.

Whitey, who had been listening, cleared his throat, started to speak, then changed his mind and stared off into the distance. Deprived of his hypodermic needle and innumerable pills, hypochondria had him in a horrible grip. He had been wondering whether Alaman couldn't find some herb for him, too. At first he had adopted the attitude of a man doomed to the grave and Shamus had been concerned. The sudden cessation of his regular insulin injections after so many years might prove disastrous to a chronic *diabetic*. And the filthy diet everyone was forced to live on—wild sago, berries, and an occasional mud crab—seemed no provender for a delicate stomach.

As the days passed, however, long days spent at hard, concentrated labor in the open air, Whitey's appetite not only improved, it became so voracious he swallowed everything in sight and looked around hungrily for more. He ate berries and stalked the wily mud crabs, which were rapidly becoming educated, with infinite skill and cunning.

Another remarkable thing had occurred—he was sleeping! And without pills! At first he had been unwilling to admit, like all confirmed hypochondriacs, that his profound slumber, lasting almost from dusk till dawn, had been anything more than a light nap, a troubled forty winks, so to speak. When this revolutionary phenomenon happened for the second and then the third night, and seemed likely to continue, he was bewildered.

"Holy Mackerel!" he exclaimed. "Three nights in a row and all the way through! I haven't done that for nineteen years, not even with fifteen grains of sodium amytol, let alone nembutol. Am I going nuts, or what?"

Mystified, suspecting himself a mere victim of nature's cruel mockery, he kept taking his pulse throughout the day, frowning and shaking his head at the apparently satisfying results. Nevertheless, he decided on a policy of "wait and see" with regard to Tulare's potion—if there were to be a guinea pig he preferred it to be Jodo.

By the time a week had passed a considerable change had

taken place in the clearing. Under the direction of Tulare, three more shacks had appeared on the second day as if by magic; crude but practical structures, the uprights and crossbeams, made from fallen branches dragged in from the jungle, were bound together with tough strands of the D'Alberti's vine. Now, except for the absence of pigs and mongrel dogs, the clearing was beginning to look like a small but neat native village.

Cleo slept in the hut in which Jodo lay, while Shamus, Whitey, and Jim occupied the one next to it. The crew occupied the others.

Under a sago-leaf canopy, propped up on a crude cradle in the center of the clearing, was the precious longboat, the two gaping holes in her side now in process of being slowly and painstakingly squared off, grooved, and patched with no better tools than the two knives.

Everything, the most minute movement of daily life, the center of every thought, was now concentrated upon the longboat and the two precious knives.

Every morning her two water butts were removed from beneath the seats fore and aft, and in the daytime placed full of water in the hot sun, the better to condition them against the weather. The Kanakas had found pandanus trees and were constructing a native sail from their great tough leaves.

The spruce oars had been pricked full of tiny holes with a knife point and rubbed continuously yet frugally with the minute quantity of oil Tulare had been able to extract from the kernels of sago palms.

Every bit of the mangrove crabs was vitally necessary for food, but Shamus always managed to retain portions of the most portly-looking ones to extract the fat from their bones, boiling the offal already sucked dry, and carefully scooping up the last vestige of fat from the top of the boiled water. This he hoarded, some to be rubbed sparsely on the oar leather where it came in contact with the rowlocks, and the rest to be saved for its food value against the voyage to come.

How everyone was going to fit in the boat, recross the bar, and face the open sea in such a flimsy craft, everyone secretly wondered. As yet the issue had not been discussed.

There was too much to do. Everyone worked, ate whatever

the foraging parties brought in, and slept. Everyone except Jodo. Immobile, he lay upon his couch in brooding silence.

In the hottest hours of the day the crew plastered their woolly heads with mud as a protection from the ferocious sun, and after a few days of sweltering, the white men followed their example. Not Cleo. The sun could wither her up to a dried Kansas corn stalk, she determined, before that. In defiance of bugs, mosquitoes, and anything else that crawled or flew, she finally sacrificed a major portion of her remaining tattered garments to effect a bandana. She had her hands full, too, attending Jodo and gathering wood for the fire which was kept burning continuously near the doorway of her hut. At night eerie grunts and deep bellowings betrayed the presence of monster crocodiles in the dark swamps on all sides. But Shamus wouldn't allow the fire to be banked higher—even dry fuel was becoming scarce.

At length Shamus became aware that a watch was being kept upon the clearing from the edges of the jungle. Searching for bark suitable for pulping into calking, he had heard a slight scuffling noise in the jungle, and his heart had leaped with hope that the sound might indicate the presence of game—perhaps a cassowary, the large emu-like bird of New Guinea, or a kus-kus, the tree-climbing marsupial whose meat is excellent.

Intending to mark the spot and set a snare, he began creeping cautiously in the direction of the sound. As he carefully parted some brush in front of him, the thick undergrowth suddenly exploded into life. He caught a brief glimpse of two diminutive naked rumps, a ferocious, tattooed face. There came a sharp hissing sound, some projectile whizzed by his head, and then the jungle swallowed them up.

Shamus didn't wait to see more—his instant reaction was fear of an immediate attack in force. He turned and dashed full tilt in the opposite direction.

Everyone gathered round as he explained what had happened. For a moment no one said anything, and then Cleo spoke in a small, choked voice.

"But I don't get it. What have we done? Are they liable to attack us? What for?"

"There's no way of telling," Shamus answered soberly. "We can just wait—and work. If we're lucky, perhaps we can get the

boat finished before they decide to come after us. First thing is to build some sort of stockade around the longboat—we might as well get what little protection we can while we work. Go as seldom as possible near the edges of the jungle. I don't know what they shot at me—an arrow, or a blow dart, but it was probably poisoned. Anyway, above all," he concluded, "try to appear unconcerned. They haven't much courage as a rule, and if we don't seem afraid—well, it's about all we can do."

Fatuous advice, he thought helplessly as he went back to the longboat, when at any moment a sudden flight of arrows might come raining out of the jungle. A stockade wouldn't mean a thing in the event of a real attack, but at least it might give more sense of security than working in the open clearing.

One day Alaman brought back an ominous report: many patches of wild sago growing in the swamps were being systematically cut down and destroyed in the night.

Shamus received the news with a blank expression, although inwardly his spirits sank still farther. So that was the strategy, the first part of it anyway; they were to be starved out. More than ever now it amounted to a race against time.

Then several events took place in quick succession to dismay everyone. On the eighth day three of the boat's crew deserted. Sent out as a separate foraging unit, the boys failed to return in the evening.

The defection depressed Shamus but didn't surprise him. Coming from the beautiful islands of the Manus Group, gentle peace-loving people, they must have felt their best hope of salvation lay in flight. And, he thought grimly, there would now be three less for the overcrowded longboat to carry. But on the morning of the ninth day there came a terrible sequel. Cleo, coming out of her hut, almost stumbled over something in the doorway. She gave one look and screamed.

On the ground, tied together like coconuts, were the severed heads of the three deserters. The gruesome souvenirs lay mud-spattered and horrible, little dark rivulets of blood streaking off into the ground.

The scream brought everyone running. They stood staring in abject horror. If a doubt existed before in any mind as to the disposition of the Ramus, it was now dispelled. As Alaman re-

moved the sickening warnings to bury them, everyone resumed his task in silence and heavy foreboding.

On another day they were delayed on account of Jimmy being bitten by a scorpion about the size of a shrimp. He was, moreover, bitten in a most painful and humiliating spot. At the time he was sitting down, and the brute managed to crawl up his trouser leg without his becoming aware of it. At his first movement, it whipped its evil tail over and struck.

Jimmy sprang into the air with such a loud yell that Shamus, thinking the attack must be upon them, seized his club and shouted for the prearranged battle stations. Again everyone came running frantically to the shelter of the flimsy stockade.

Doubled over, and clutching his groin with both hands, Jimmy danced around in the center of the clearing, with maniacal belowings. "My God, what's got me?" he yelled in agony, his fiendish and perverse grin contorting his face more than ever. "What is it? What's got me?"

When at last the ugly brute fell out of his pants leg, squashed, his groin began to swell immediately. A poultice of Alaman's healing herb leaves was applied and relieved the pain somewhat. But many precious hours of work were lost on the very exacting joining job—one requiring great care and patience, and at which Jimmy had become very skillful.

The experience unnerved more than incapacitated him. Between spasms of nausea he sat morosely in the shade, still snarling his grin, and voiced a disparaging, and for him voluble, diatribe against Destiny.

"Unfriendly planetary influences!" he muttered darkly. "That's what I've been laboring under all my life. A scorpion! How can I win? For crissake, I couldn't even win an argument! There were five thousand holes for that son-of-a-bitch to go crawl in and he has to crawl up my pants leg." His good eye narrowed with sullen resentment at the manifest injustice. "But what am I squawking for?" he inquired with a bitter laugh. "I always get slipped the moldy fig. It's been the same way all my life and I guess it always will be. Luck! What luck I got!" Staring into space for a moment, he muttered, "Take a broad and saw her in half and I'd get the half that eats." With this gloomy philosophy he rose to his feet and was sick again.

Late that same afternoon Tulare, squatting by the side of the longboat and carefully honing his knife blade on a smooth piece of stone with slow, methodical strokes, suddenly paused and cocked his head to one side. For a moment he listened intently. Then he rose to his feet and made a short, low hissing sound, "Psst!"

Gauna, the boy seated next to him, rose also. Listening a moment he nodded. "Ay-ye!" he exclaimed fearfully.

Faintly upon the jungle air, so far distant as yet that the sound only would be detected by the most finely attuned hearing, there came a low, ominously rhythmic, muffled rumble. It swelled slightly, faded into nothing, and then rose again.

"Garramuts—they come!" Gauna spoke tensely in the Rabaul language. "It is time to flee!" He cast a quick look around as if seeking some avenue to escape.

Tulare didn't even bother to turn his head. He stared off into the jungle with his usual impassive gaze. When he spoke there was a cold note of contempt in his voice. "You are a fool. Tulan ran, and Mikar, and Minakona. Alaman planted their heads—have you forgotten?"

Alaman, carefully calking a seam in the longboat, looked up and nodded gravely. "True," he said, and turned back to his work.

Gauna's eyes rolled. He stood motionless for a moment but his light brown skin began turning clay-colored as the tide of terror rose within him. Then he went swiftly to Alaman, as if from him he could perhaps derive some sympathy denied him by the stoical Tulare.

"But are we to wait here and be killed?"

Alaman, continuing with his work, ignored him completely. The nimble brain behind his dark, imponderable features had long since calculated every facet of the odds against survival. He didn't think much of anyone's chances. But he had arrived at the conclusion that his best and only hope lay in implicit obedience to the Taubada's leadership, and to that of Tulare under the Taubada.

Meanwhile Tulare walked with dignity and no undue haste to Shamus, who was kneeling on the ground calking a lower seam. "Garramuts," he announced laconically, nodding toward

the jungle.

Shamus stood up and listened. He could hear nothing. Alaman went on working quietly.

Tulare watched his master for a moment and then said, "Killing talk—I think."

It was fully fifteen minutes, however, before the deep measured pounding on the crocodile-skin drums became audible to everyone's ear.

By that time, Shamus had made the best dispositions possible. With a sinking heart, he thought once again of the utter hopelessness of the situation. Even to assume attitudes of defense was out of the question; violence and certain massacre would probably result sooner than if everyone stuck to the original plan of going calmly about their normal routine tasks in the hope of creating an impression of unconcern.

The weakness of the flimsy bluff, everyone knew. Everyone, therefore, had a weapon of his own contrivance hidden readily accessible. Whitey and Jim had chosen clubs. Shamus had one of the two knives in his belt. Tulare fastened the other to a pole to use as a spear. He balanced it carefully in his right hand and made several practice passes, then hid it under some leaves near the longboat.

The plan was already made. At a given word from Shamus they were all to rally around the frail stockade and there fight—to a quick end. For, as he pointed out, the alternative of surrender did not exist. A nicety of behavior peculiar to the civilized, for them it could only lead to unspeakable and prolonged barbarities. Flight, too, was out of the question—in the surrounding swamps and waterways, hunting them down one by one would merely provide a leisurely sport.

The dull rumble of the garramuts had drawn closer. He called everyone together in Cleo's and Jodo's hut for a fast and final conference.

But, facing them, he learned that he had little to say. As he looked at Cleo, he found himself without words. The thought that she might fall into the hands of Anitok and his men—alive—filled him with a choking fury and futile dismay. Yet what was there to be said about that?

"There is little to be said," he began. "For the error of judg-

ment which kept you all on the ship when you might have reached shore, I'm sorry. The result could have been little different in any case—save that, had you all been on shore, Doc might still be with us. But the *Maski* could scarcely have lived through that storm wherever she'd been anchored. As to—”

With something like a growl, Whitey interrupted him.

“Can it, Cap,” he said. “You don't have to apologize for anything. We've been in good hands straight through, and we are now.” He looked at Jim and Cleo. “Am I right, or what?”

“A hundred percent,” Jim grunted. “What I say is, like the top soak in the war who said to his men as they went over the top, ‘Ya don't want to live forever, do ya?’” He paused for a second, and muttered, “The trouble is, ya do.”

Cleo said nothing, but walking swiftly to Shamus she stood beside him and held his hand hard in hers, her bangle bracelet, tinkling in incongruous gayety, and looked up into his eyes. There was fear, deep in her eyes, he saw pityingly, but there was steadfast courage, too, and a message of trust in him. Somehow, she seemed to be saying, though it looked pretty bad just now, she believed he would pull them through. He gritted his teeth in a fury of impotence. If only he could. If only—

Suddenly the steady rhythm of the garramuts rose to an increased tempo and then stopped. An eerie silence followed. Everyone looked at Shamus questioningly. After a moment the deep throb resumed.

“Closer,” said Jimmy tensely, grinning through teeth that had a chatter to them. His glass eye glared balefully out of the doorway. The other shifted around, peering out into the jungle across the clearing.

Shamus nodded. What an outrage, he was thinking, for death to approach like this, slinking, inexorable, stealthy, like a thief in the night. This was an insult, almost an obscenity. Death, you would have thought, would have more sense of its own dignity. There should be nothing latent about it, any more than birth, or life itself. Faced as inevitable, the whole concept of death was such a simple one—provided it didn't behave like a pawnbroker. Death should always approach in a manner forthright, fast and furious, like a clap of thunder, swiftly, like the blast of a bullet. With dignity.



He looked up suddenly to catch an oblique glance from Whitey from under lowered eyelids. His gaze was fastened on Cleo. Yes, he knew too. He was thinking the same unspoken, horrifying thought. Cleo alone, her bravado no longer a shield, helpless, faced with an obscene reality, a degradation she could not possibly realize. Or did she? He saw her gaze suddenly fixed with a horrible intensity upon the knife in his belt, as though fascinated. The mixture of horror and intense compulsion—almost like an overpowering desire—which he saw, reminded him of a man he had once seen staring into the eyes of a king cobra just before the giant snake struck.

At this point a sneering voice broke the silence, cold, implacable, sarcastic: "Who are you kidding, babe?" Jodo was staring up at her, his gray lips drawn in a thin line of cold contempt. He uttered a croaking laugh. "For Christ sake! Thinking of killing yourself? With what? Your fingernails? You know goddam well you'd never have the guts to stick that knife in you. So why don't you quit hamming it up? We're all going to get murdered in a minute."

As their eyes met, Cleo bit her lip in embarrassment. Then her eyes flashed, and for a moment it seemed as though the spark might burst into a conflagration. Only a moment she looked, and then turned back to Shamus.

"Care for a short stroll?" she asked. "We might whip up an appetite before dinner."

Shamus's eyes flashed back at her, silently commending the innocuous words. What did it matter if they exposed themselves a little apart from the others now? He would see that they did not go far, and actually the assembled company was only negligibly more formidable than two alone.

Hand in hand they walked silently away from the hut in the direction of the beach. Deep within him lay the thought of Ganice, but now he found no inconsistency, no conflict, between that and his desire, when death seemed close upon him, to take Cleo in his arms and speak the words of yearning which had been pushing more eagerly for expression ever since they had been here. The role Cleo had played in their predicament had vastly increased her stature in his eyes. Not once had she referred by word or intimation either to the night they had come together

on the beach or to the quarrel of the following morning. No word or gesture of love had passed between them. Shamus had always had a theory that women—even the best women—were females first and human beings second. But Cleo, in this circumstance, had been superbly a human being. One of them, she had done her share of the work skillfully and cheerfully, had neither asked nor expected any especial consideration, and had not at any time indulged in any of the arrogant feminine exhibitionism which had marked her conduct during the early days of the voyage.

Shamus wished terribly that he could at least tell her how much he admired this now, and how grateful he was to her. But the strange two-sidedness of his nature, the oddly proportioned mixture of disciplined intellectuality with the sensuality which she alone brought out in him, would not allow him to surrender to the sweet sadness of the moment.

Seeking refuge behind his customary barrier of formality, he forced a rueful smile. "An odd situation," he said. "I can't talk to you as I wish I could. You know, I wouldn't be minding this half so much if I could find a way to get you out of it."

She made no answer, but held his hand the more tightly.

"I'd like you to know that I'm sorry for my—well, brusqueness on the ship the morning after—our shore dinner. I know I spoke and acted without consideration. I'd undo that if I could. I hope you'll forgive me. I suppose the thing that—that tormented and hurt me so much really didn't matter—if it was Doc. Least of all now."

Now she looked up at him, and there was frank puzzlement in her eyes, as she spoke. "Doc?" she asked. "I don't know what you mean. Of course I forgive you—I did that before the day was over, without your asking. Only—I couldn't understand what had gotten into you. Finally I decided that—well, I'm a bitch. I guess that's no secret to you. I thought maybe you were disgusted with me. I couldn't blame you. But what do you mean by saying that 'it was Doc'?"

"I came down to say good night," Shamus said haltingly. "I heard you speaking about us—and laughing. I—well, I couldn't stand that. It meant—quite a lot."

"Oh, Shamus, my poor darling!" she cried, and there were

tears in the eyes that looked up at him, soft with love and a certain deep gladness. "So that was it. I remember." Swiftly she told him what had really happened in the cabin that night.

He said nothing—words were too futile. At length he managed, pedantically, "I suppose it's no good trying to excuse myself by saying that it meant a very great deal to me."

"It meant a lot to me, too, darling," she went on, softly. "How could you have doubted it? But of course you could, seeing the way I'd been acting. But I couldn't have talked to anyone about it just then. You see, I was hoping—"

She paused and looked away, and Shamus waited in silence. Together they listened to the dull rumble in the jungle.

"It's funny," she went on suddenly, "how often I'd thought of having a baby before I met you. I wouldn't be telling you this if it weren't for those damned drums. It didn't make any difference whether I was married or not, because I'd got to the point where I could truthfully say I didn't give a damn what anyone thought of me. People are such fools about the things they approve of and the things they condemn. There aren't many of them you could ever give a damn about, really. Yet you get so lonely. But if you had a baby that you loved, and that loved you, you could be independent of everyone else—just the two of you against the world, like a closed corporation. I've been told it doesn't work, that as the baby grew up things were bound to catch up with you, but I would have made it work—I know I would. Only thing was, I could never find the father—he had to be too many things. And then you came along. . . ."

Shamus looked at her swiftly, the question which rose so quickly and insistently to his mind putting out for the moment everything else. "And—?"

She laughed again, a low, wild, sad laugh, squeezing his hand. "Silly! It's too soon to tell. The chances are all against it."

They were almost out of sight of the camp now, and Shamus stopped. Cleo stopped, too, and faced him, her hand still in his, looking steadfastly into his eyes.

"One thing," she said, slowly, "I want you to know—whatever happens—you don't owe me a thing. I owe you—for giving me back things I'd forgotten about. . . ." She spoke in a strange little low-pitched voice, which broke off suddenly. "It's been

swell knowing you, Captain." She bowed, reverting to burlesque. "Just one little thing—if you could do it without too much inconvenience. Would you kiss me once more—now?"

She raised her face to him, and Shamus took her swiftly into his arms, and as he felt the soft slenderness of her melt into him, he felt again that wondrous sense of affinity for which words, even feelings, were too trivial, and only life itself large enough. He crushed her so fiercely that what was left of her tattered blouse came loose as his hands slid hungrily around the bare skin of her waist until her breasts crushed soft under them. The slender muscles at first went taut to his touch, and then relaxed, and with a little moan she clung to him, fiercely kissing him with a long kiss that closed out fear and the thought of imminent death and the fear of being ever again individual entities.

"Cleo, my dear, my dear!" he whispered, but could find no other words, and she, her arms about his neck, said, softly, "Thank you, darling. Let's go back to work now." Hand in hand, in taut silence, they walked back to the longboat.

Suddenly the sound of the garramuts ceased. One last drum, quite close, rolled out a tatter and then was silent again. Silence, deep and profound, settled down over the clearing like a tangible thing, as Cleo and Shamus joined the others.

But only for a moment. There came an amazing visitation—so sudden as to jar each heart. A rushing sound, as of myriad invisible wings beating the air, came to their startled ears. For a second the sky became as dark as if a heavy cloud had obscured the sun. As if by the wave of a magic wand, every tree around the edge of the clearing burst into a flashing sheen of blazing gold and purple, transformed in a swift instant to a miraculous symphony of color.

Simultaneously, the air on all sides exploded. Raucous, discordant screeches filled it, as if a horde of demoniacal small boys were running bicycle spokes across an expanse of corrugated iron.

Then the flock of thousands of birds-of-paradise, coming to feed in the clearing and startled by the unexpected presence of men below, rose swiftly into the air again, filling it with shimmering crimson gold, and fled screeching into the jungle.

Cleo looked at Shamus with glowing eyes. She was, he knew,

taking it as an omen of hope for some reason. He wished she weren't. He knew there wasn't any.

*Chapter Sixteen: A MONSTROUS HATE*

WHEN the monstrous little curiosity that was Anitok, tyrant and undisputed ruler of the Great River, drew himself up to his full height, he reached nearly four and a half feet off the ground. It is possible he might have weighed all of 80 pounds—stripped, naturally—for no other method of judging his weight was conceivable since, excepting certain sparse ornaments, he was about as naked as a well-kept ship's bottom.

A necklet of two curved wild-boar tusks hanging on his chest comprised the upper part of his costume; below, a curious sort of G-string, made of twisted bark and so closely matching the shade of his body you had to look close even to realize it was there, wound around his waist. In front, half a hollow cylindrical gourd, topped by a round sea shell, stretched from his crotch to his navel, and was bound close to his belly by the G-string. On his hip, stuck in the G-string, a white dagger gleamed, fashioned from the hard shinbone of a cassowary. Two long, golden-chartreuse, bird-of-paradise plumes trailed from his startling mop of white woolly hair, as white as a powdered pompadour from the copious quantities of crushed lime rubbed into it. This not only for decorative purposes, but practical—to kill the lice with which it abounded.

Apart from his woolly topknot he was almost hairless. His black visage sported a travesty of a nose, squashed out flat across his face. Above it, two small piercing eyes peered out brightly. Below, thick lips parted and curled above teeth black-stained from betelnut.

Behind this façade there burned an extremely agile, cunning brain, one somewhat twisted by an early and altogether unfortunate contact with the outside world, and one in which fermented two obsessions: an unsatisfied craving for power, and a deep and lasting hatred of the white man. As a matter of fact, in the whole Ramu River district of New Guinea, he was one of the very few who had ever seen a white man.

Had Anitok lived in the contemporary world, in any land but

the least civilized, the darkest, most mysterious yet to be explored, he would undoubtedly have been the titular leader of many men and probably the dupe of a powerful malicious few, for he possessed that combination of shrewdness and aggressive egotism which masses of humanity have always been ready to follow with the vain exhibitionism which plays into the hands of those quieter, actually more powerful, behind-the-scenes manipulators who use natural leaders for their own purposes. In him, demagoguery was a congenital instinct. To it, and the skillful planning of his silent partner in statesmanship, he owed his unique position of power and prestige among the Ramus, for he was not born a hereditary chief. Nor was he even distantly related to one. And he had certainly not been elected by popular vote. He was a natural, an original, who, even as a youth, a stripling without a voice in tribal councils, one who had not even won the right to pierce his nose cartilage with a polished pig bone—the sign of bravery and manhood—had never ceased asserting his right to leadership.

In a primitive community, as in any modern dictatorship, such pretensions are usually tantamount to involuntary suicide. While still a young man, Anitok had barely avoided this fate by hurriedly putting out to sea in his canoe, pursued by other canoes. Luckily for him it was a dark night, and, after many days at sea, he was picked up by the *Finshafen*, a German inter-island copra freighter, carrying a French-English-Kanaka crew, and hauled aboard—a terrified, exhausted, bewildered Pygmy, who grunted for water in no known language.

He was put to work in the freighter's galley, where he made the acquaintance of a tall Kanaka who went by the name of Kanaka Tom. Anitok was first attracted to the six-foot-two stoker by a marvelous tattooing job sported by the latter. When Tom stood naturally, a naked woman emblazoned on his chest stood at attention, demure and serene. But when he threw his monstrous chest out and his shoulders back, a wonderful thing took place—she was suddenly in a voluptuous and enticing attitude, and she was smiling. And Tom responded in a friendly fashion as any good showman will to an appreciative audience. But under Tom's showmanship, a deeper, more powerful motive was at work. Tom was sick of being a stoker, and he saw possi-

bilities in the little man whom chance had thrown his way. Bit by bit, friendship—genuine enough on Anitok's part, if Machiavellian on Tom's—blossomed between them, and avenues of communication broadened in a language which they concocted between each other—made up of strange expressions of Pidgin English hooked onto words from both Anitok's native language and Tom's, which were naturally as different from each other as are Japanese and French. No one else could understand them when they talked to each other, but Tom spoke a rather high-grade Pidgin which almost achieved the King's English in spots, and so he acted as interpreter for the little fellow.

At Sydney, on that voyage of the *Finshafen*, Anitok was afraid to go ashore and Kanaka Tom regretfully left him behind and went alone. But later Anitok became lonesome, and the first mate, yielding to his vehement signs and guttural importunities, gave him his first shore leave—not without certain qualms at letting the tiny, inarticulate savage loose in a city like Sydney. But it seemed to him unfair to keep the Pygmy continually cooped up on board while the rest of the crew disported themselves ashore.

Twice during this one day in Sydney, Anitok had encounters with the white race which lit inextinguishable fires of resentment and desire for revenge burning in his soul. The first occurred within the emporium of Anthony Hondern's, Sydney's largest general merchandise store, into which Anitok found his way, boldly decorated with a hibiscus bloom behind each ear—stolen from the public park—to announce to the world that he was not so much a man looking for a wife as one available for courtship.

There happened to be a sale on, and in the rush he nearly got trampled underfoot several times. Once one of the flowers was brushed from his hair, but he retrieved it and pushed ahead until at last he spotted the object of his search on one of the shelves—a large bolt of red-spotted calico.

He had some difficulty in making known his wishes to the young lady behind the counter and also chinning himself up to it. But eventually she caught the drift of his signs, hauled down the bolt of cloth and said, "Very good sir eighteen and sixpence please will that be all?"

Anitok didn't understand, but he sensed she was asking for

payment. Cautiously, for he was too smart a trader to pay before receiving the goods, he unclutched his hand and carefully laid the pound note on the counter. But before he could snatch it back the woman suddenly pounced upon the money, and seizing the bolt of calico at the same time, flung it behind her out of Anitok's sight.

"Thank you, sir. I'll 'ave it wrapped for you and your change'll be right back."

Nervously Anitok watched her reach overhead, take down a small metal container and stuff his pound note into it. Giving the container a twist, she replaced it overhead again when it hung suspended for a split second on some wires. Then she seized a cord, gave it a hard jerk, and to Anitok's horror and amazement the container with his pound note in it went whizzing away across the ceiling!

The swiftness of it all stunned him for a moment. Aghast, he let out a shout of rage. Tricked! And robbed at the same time! Now he had neither calico nor money! But wait—he could still see the metal container flying overhead in the distance.

Spluttering a curse at the bewildered girl, he leaped off in pursuit across the crowded room, dodging in and out among legs, potted palms, and tables. People stumbled and clutched at counters as the small black and white bullet hurtled between their legs.

It was no use. Fleet of foot though he was, the container out-distanced him, suddenly shot around a sharp corner, and was lost to sight. By the time he had fought his way to the corner it had disappeared. Out of breath, trembling, he stood by a cigar counter and thought the whole thing over. The bitter realization came to him that he had been outwitted by the cunning white woman—his own fault for letting the money out of one hand without getting the other on the calico.

Sadly he made his way back to the quay, and sat down at the appointed rendezvous to wait for the ship's launch.

In an hour or so he heard a loud strident voice coming along the quay. It was the atoll Kanaka Tom approaching, singing. And in addition to the singing at the top of his lungs, the big, good-natured fellow was weaving about from side to side. Too much betelnut, thought Anitok. To get that way he must have



been swallowing instead of chewing; men often became light-headed and foolish swallowing gobs of betelnut.

When Tom spotted Anitok he stopped singing and stood looking at him. A broad grin came over his face. "Ahoy!" he greeted him boisterously.

"Ahoy!" replied Anitok sulkily.

Weaving dangerously, Tom leaned down and slapped Anitok on the shoulder. After a brief struggle with his shirt he pulled a bottle out of it. He tilted his head back, poured some down his throat, and handed the bottle to Anitok.

Anitok swallowed a big gulp—nearly had a seizure. The fiery liquor burnt his throat and ignited his intestines. Tears gushed into his eyes and blinded him.

Choking and spluttering, he jumped up and rushed down to the boat landing. Without a pause he dove head first into the water and surfaced with a mouthful, which he squirted into the air. Immediately he felt better, although his stomach was still smoldering.

Tom, who seemed to take it all as a matter of course, stretched forth a hand to yank him back onto the pontoon. Unfortunately he misjudged and fell in on top of Anitok. They both scrambled out and Anitok took his shirt off and wrung it out.

Suddenly Tom stopped singing. He thought for a moment, frowning, and then turned to Anitok with an even broader grin, making certain crude but unmistakable signs.

A surge of excitement came over Anitok. He nodded eagerly to Tom and felt in his hair for the hibiscus flowers. They were no longer there, having apparently been washed out by his hurried plunge into the water. Well, to go without hibiscus flowers was hardly correct, but he hoped the woman could be made to understand. When it came to courtship, Anitok was quite particular about protocol.

Together the two set out along the waterfront, toward Woolloomoo. Anitok felt a peculiar dizziness, and on stopping to look in a mirror, one of which he never passed without inspecting, he suddenly burst out laughing at his reflection. Practically everything he saw now amused him, and he felt incredibly light of foot. He felt as though, if he wanted to go, he could make a soaring spring, like a bird-of-paradise, and without any effort

rise into the sky.

Obviously Tom knew where he was going, for he led the way without hesitation. They passed by dreary-looking tenement houses of dull brick red, with laundry flying like pennants in the backyards, and by ragged children crouched on the ground playing marbles between puddles of muddy water in the street. Some of the children were playing hopscotch, jumping on one leg across white chalked squares marked off on the sidewalk.

Anitok was feeling a strange numbness in his limbs now, a kind of lethargy, so he paused a few minutes and watched.

One little girl about his own size fascinated him. She had blond hair braided into pigtails and tied with large white ribbons, and each time she jumped her dress flew up and exposed a small rounded expanse of pink pants.

The pants flew through the air like new moons overcrossing. He wished he could see what size her breasts were; that was the most aggravating thing about white women: by covering themselves up with calico they made it impossible to tell if they were flat underneath. His eyes darted around, a bit glazed, but sharp. Whose woman was she, he wondered?

As he watched the slender white limbs leaping, desire rose within him to almost overpowering heights. His nostrils dilated, and he clenched and unclenched his fists. Again Tom laughed and pointed down the street. Reluctantly Anitok allowed himself to be led on.

They passed by innumerable second-hand shop windows, with crowded fantastic treasures, only a few of which he had ever seen before. How rich, how potent, the white man! Knives, weapons of all sorts, pictures, machines like there were on the boat for telling time without the sun, little bottles, innumerable other things.

In one shop window a fabulous sight held him spellbound in awe and admiration—a full-length figure of a woman, but apparently made out of pink clay or something. Other figures of both sexes, some with mustaches, all wore clothes, but this one was naked! And to his complete amazement, he noticed that she was utterly devoid of any sex organs! He pointed this out to Tom, who rolled his eyes and shrugged—apparently the phenomenon was nothing new to him.

On they went, past a cordial factory with a big pile of empty bottles in the courtyard, past a grimy and bedraggled citizen pushing a cart before him. "Any rags, bags, bottles, or bones?" he cried stridently every so often, "Any rags, bags, bottles, or bones?" His voice rose plaintively at the end, nostalgically like the magic man's at home in the village when he asked the gods if fire would sweep the Kunai plains before the rains come.

At one corner Tom stopped by a fish vendor's cart for a moment to buy some shrimps in a brown paper bag for twopence. He gave a handful to Anitok, who chewed them up, heads and all, and spat out no residue. Together they went on, munching the shrimps.

Finally Tom halted in front of a black-painted wrought iron fence with three stone-flagged steps leading to a brown door, on which hung a sign: *BEDS*, it said, and then in smaller letters below, *Sixpence a night*.

Tom beckoned to Anitok to follow and lurched somewhat unsteadily up the steps. At the top he fished in his shirt again and took out the bottle for a quick gulp. There was not much left, but again he offered it generously to Anitok, who grunted and shook his head—his mouth still felt numb and shriveled from that first swallow. Tom finished it off, and placing the empty bottle on a window sill, gave three distinctly spaced knocks on the door.

Almost instantly it came ajar; half a woman's face peered out warily. She didn't see Anitok at first glance, but when her eyes lit upon him she seemed considerably taken aback at the spectacle of the tiny figure with the grotesque face and mop of crinkly hair standing beside Tom's hefty six and a half feet. But apparently any doubts she had were dispelled. After a quick look up and down the street she beckoned them both inside, slammed the door, and bolted it.

"Strike me pink!" she exclaimed archly, putting an arm around Tom's waist and giving it a quick hug. "You must like it 'ere, matey. We only just said goodby to yer. Come on—I'll get the girls down."

She ushered them down the hall, paused at the bottom of a flight of steps, placed a hand to her mouth, and bellowed stridently, "Mi-i-ibel! Al-lice! Come on down, dearies—couple

gentlemen to see yer." Without waiting for a reply she turned back with a beaming face and said, "Orlright, mates—let's go into the parlor."

Anitok had never seen such a woman. Big, yes, and strong, but in the dark depths of his savage little heart he had always coveted a big woman. And what hair! The color of a sunset. And there was no ambiguity about her bosom—great mountains billowed forth, threatening to burst the bulging calico which held them in precarious check.

What fascinated him most of all was her teeth. Half of them were made of metal—a bright, shimmering yellow metal! In his village the young braves often wore ornaments of human teeth, betelnut-stained dentures, sharp-pointed from filing, taken from enemies killed in battle. But these! What a necklet these metal ones would make.

She led them toward a door from which strange sounds issued. On entering Anitok saw the noise was being made by a big man seated at a large box in the corner. As he poked the box with his fingers, sounds, sort of cries, came out of it. The big man paid no attention, however, but spoke to the box in a low sing-song voice, pausing occasionally to drink out of a glass. His actions were rather puzzling. Since he was neither lying on his face or kneeling with forehead touching the ground, Anitok supposed he must be doing something other than praying.

The big woman went out. Anitok was about to follow her immediately, but at that moment the door opened and two more women, one with light hair and the other with black, came into the room.

He perched down again on the sofa and examined them with a somewhat jaundiced eye; neither had enough meat on her bones for him. As for the ladies, after they recovered from their first shock, both made a simultaneous dive for Tom.

"E's mine!" said the light-haired one, waving the other away. "You win Tom Thumb, lovey."

Turning, she wound her arms around Tom and sat down on his knees. "Blimey, dearie, didn't know you'd come back to me so soon." She cooed, slapping him playfully on his great chest.

Tom laughed, put his hands under her legs, and lifted her. With a little squeal she snuggled closer. Anitok looked on with

envious appreciation. That was it. Tom's wonderful tattooing was irresistible; by all means he must ask Tom to show him where he could have some done.

The dark-haired woman came over beside him and sat looking at him with a slight frown. Anitok reached out a hand to feel if she had good breasts, and she drew back with a surprised laugh. "You fresh little monkey!" she said. Then she reached out and took Anitok's lower lip between two fingers. "Wot on earth 'ave you been chewing?" she asked, pulling it down and looking wonderingly at his black betelnut-stained teeth.

Anitok grinned widely and swelled with pride; to play with his mouth like that meant that the woman must fancy him. While she was nowhere near as much to his taste as the big one, she would do.

He looked around the room. Tom and the other woman had disappeared, but the man making the noise on the box gave no sign of leaving, although he had his back turned and seemed pretty much occupied. But in any event it would be a bad thing to take the woman in front of him.

He rose, made a sign, and seized the woman by the wrist. She laughed and rose too. "Orlright, duckey," she said, "come on—you're going to look funny, though—" She took his hand and led the way out of the room.

Just as they began mounting the stairs. Anitok suddenly saw the big strong woman returning along the passageway. She was carrying a tray with some glasses on it. Anitok felt his pulse give a leap. Ah, yes—this was the woman for him! Shaking his hand loose from the black-haired woman he turned and seized the other's dress.

"Follow me," he ordered in his native tongue, and pointed upstairs.

Both women began laughing, although to a keen ear a slight note of asperity might have been discernible in the mirth of the black-haired one.

"You go right ahead, dearie," she said with hauteur. "Here, give me the tray. To think I got up out of bed for the little runt!"

But the big woman refused to surrender the tray.

"Now, Alice, I've got no time to take care of 'im. I've got two sheep-shearers out in the kitchen, one of 'em drunk as a goat,

and calling for drinks all the time. In the back room Mr. Good-year's been waiting 'arf an hour already for Bessie, the lazy slut. Take 'im up now, like a good girl. Go on."

She gave the black-haired woman a good-natured shove, and Anitok thought they were about to start a fight over him. Then the big woman smiled at him, ran a hand over his woolly head, and gave him a shove too.

"Be good kids, now," she admonished.

With regret Anitok watched her disappear down the passage.

"Orlright, make up your mind—do you want to, or doncha?"

For some reason the black-haired woman was now speaking to him in a harsh, unfriendly voice. Her eyes held a cool look, too. Anitok wished he had the words to reassure her—to tell her that while she was not as good as the big one, he was not going to disappoint her. He thought for a moment, then took her by the wrist again, grinned reassuringly, and nodded up.

The big man sitting with rolled up shirtsleeves and open waistcoat, listlessly playing *Roses of Picardy* on the piano, paused in the middle of a bar. The half-smoked cigarette hanging from one corner of his mouth gave a spasmodic twitch as he cocked an ear and listened. Some sort of disturbance was going on upstairs—a scraping of furniture, a raised female voice—

With a sigh he rose from the piano stool, took a swig of his drink, and neatly slipped his cigarette into the fireplace. Wearily he rolled his shirtsleeves up a little higher, pulled the brown felt hat down on his forehead, and went out.

As he reached the top of the stairs and stood there trying to make up his mind which room the noise was coming from, a door to his left burst open and the little, stunted runt he had noted with casual interest before shot out and barely saved himself from falling downstairs by lurching against the banister rail.

Now, however, the tiny man was trouserless, *per se* nothing particularly noteworthy to the big man, but he was followed by a heavily breathing and angry virago in a blue polka-dot dressing gown. He looked from one to the other.

"Wot's up, Alice?" he inquired in a benign tone. "Trouble?"

For a moment Alice seemed bereft of words. Then the flood gates opened and the torrent poured forth, indignation turning her accent into a shrill mixture of Australian and Cockney.

"Trouble!" She snorted. "Not 'arf, there's trouble! Stiffen the bloody crows, do you know what this 'ere narsty little sawn-off barstard 'ad the nerve to do? First 'e wants to tike 'is pick like a bloody lord. Carn't make up 'is mind 'o 'e wants, 'e carnt, me or the Madam. Then 'e tikes me up, and before I can say Jack Robinson 'as 'is fun before I can so much as arsk 'im to fork over me ten bob. Then when I *do* arsk 'im to pay 'e's got no money! 'As 'is fun and don't pay! I turned 'is bloody trahsers upside dahn and not a bloody 'a' penny came out!"

Wounded vanity, the recital of her wrongs, caused her bosom to heave tremulously, like the bobbing of two sodden potatoes cast upon the ocean from a ship's galley.

Anitok looked on, bewildered but interested by this strange turn of events.

The big man nodded understandingly and bent a melancholy eye upon the culprit. Slowly he shook his head, slowly and sadly. Suddenly his hand shot out and he grabbed Anitok by his mop of hair. Anitok felt himself lifted into the air, until he was hanging suspended, almost face to face with the big man. Struggling to free himself, he fought and kicked out savagely, for he had no lack of a certain type of courage. But he was as impotent as a cat dangling by the tail.

Holding him at arm's length, the big man began to ring him, like a bell. Helplessly he swung pendulum-like, back and forth, until he felt as if his entire scalp would part company with his cranium at any moment.

"Digger," reproved the big man, "you oughta know better than that. Didn't 'e come with a cobber?" he inquired of the black-haired girl, still ringing Anitok.

"Yus, 'is friend's in with Mibel."

"I think I'll have a little yarn with 'im, too," said the big man.

At that moment Anitok managed to spit in his face. For a brief second the big man looked astonished. Briefly Anitok's feet touched the floor as the big man wiped the saliva from his face with a sleeve.

"You dirty little devil!" he pronounced, in slow, offended tones. Then he flung Anitok down the stairs.

Anitok picked himself up at the bottom and screamed back curses at the big man. Externally, he was not very much hurt, but

within him the helpless fury, the indignity of it all, was something he would never forget.

Still trouserless, he fled out into the street. As he paused to find his bearings, an upstairs window suddenly flew up. "Serves you right, you weedy little runt!" the woman shouted down at him.

He began running down the street followed by taunting laughter, mocking, derisive. He got only about two blocks before he was arrested and hauled off to the nearest police station for indecent exposure. Somehow the *Finshafen's* broker, by questioning Tom, traced him down, and he was extricated before the ship sailed. But for the rest of his time on the *Finshafen* never again did he set foot ashore.

That had happened more than ten years before the day when the *Maski* foundered in the mouth of the Ramu. But three events had dated from that day: Anitok's undying desire to be revenged on the white race, and particularly white women; a political partnership between Anitok and Kanaka Tom; and a plan of conquest which had been born in the fertile mind of Tom, to which Anitok lent himself willingly.

Tom's plan, indeed, had already been fully made—though he never told Anitok all of it. The Pygmies, he knew, while savage, were loosely organized, exceptionally superstitious, and fearful of unusual occurrences, and quickly submissive to a strong leader. Anitok, with Tom behind him, could go far among them. When the *Finshafen* made Rabaul, Tom and Anitok jumped ship and—by dint of wheedling their way aboard a trading schooner—eventually found their way to the New Guinea coast and up into the mountains where they entered the village in which Anitok had been born, and before they had been there a week, had got the people to depose their native headman (whom Anitok and Tom removed quietly from the scene one night feet first) and accepted the leadership of Anitok.

It had not been particularly difficult, for Anitok instantly became a man of great prestige, a sort of Marco Polo, to his tribesmen. To them, any journey of more than one day's march was fraught with peril, since it brought them to the territories of "bilum," hereditary enemies. But Anitok told them of journeys of many days and nights, by means of conveyances of the gods,



and when he ran out of stories he drew on Kanaka Tom (in private) for more.

It is true that some of his tales of the fabulous things he had seen and done caused the lift of skeptical brows. Potent though they knew the white man to be, Anitok's description of his experiences in the place called Sydney, for instance, strained credulity a bit too far. Beneath dusky, wrinkled skins some might even have blushed—with embarrassment for Anitok.

Night after night for a long time Tom had coached Anitok thoroughly in stories of the wonders of Sydney—and other ports which Anitok had never seen, but which Tom had, and Anitok, who along with his other accomplishments was a born *raconteur*, repeated them as his own experiences. There was his story of the fabulous vessel which traveled as fast as a bird but never put to sea—the great schooner called “The Melbourne Express” which ran on two strips of the metal of which the white man made ax heads, which belched smoke and flame and rushed screaming through the night and the day, with a single blazing eye by which it saw its way through the dark. There was the story of the blazing torch which flamed forth from the ceiling of a room upon the touch of a button on the wall, yet which possessed no power to burn, and of the box from which the voice of a person many miles away could come to one's ears, and of another box which sang by itself. There was also the basket suspended in great houses which carried people to the very top of the houses and down again, though no man pulled at the ropes. And the springs of clear fresh water which flowed from the walls of every house into basins below, at the turn of a handle.

Stories like that (more than half of which Anitok didn't believe himself), coupled with certain shrewd and ruthless political moves initiated by Kanaka Tom, had quickly won him the place Tom had sought for him—quickly made him official headman of the village, then of the tribe, and now, after the lapse of ten years, the undisputed tyrant of a large region. And only he and Kanaka Tom knew that actually the little fellow was no more than a front, and that it was tall and powerful Kanaka Tom, with the marvelously agile woman tattooed on his chest, who was the real ruler.

Anitok was sitting in the shade of his favorite kapiac tree, having his hair deloused with crushed coral lime, when first word was brought to him of strangers arrived on his shores. Disturbed, he rose, impatiently brushing aside the two little women who had been assiduously searching his scalp, and walked swiftly to one of the two best huts in the village, where Kanaka Tom was taking a nap. As he went through the door, which was half again as high as that of any other hut in the village, another Kanaka stepped aside. That one, who called himself Dumai, owed his life to the fact that tattooed on his chest was the figure of a naked woman much like that on Tom's own. Anitok's men had taken him, along with another whom they had later killed while trying to escape, in a raid on a party led also by a white man who had the temerity to come ashore in the territory which Anitok called his own.

Dumai had, on the whole, proved a docile slave, though Anitok didn't altogether trust him. He was too silent, too brooding, as though always in the back of his head some plan was revolving, some scheme which did not entirely harmonize with his outward docility. The little tyrant scowled fiercely at the slave, not neglecting to fill his eyes with the chest tattooing, and said, "Raus!" The German word was one of the half dozen known to Anitok which could be understood anywhere in Melanesia. He strode with the grotesque movements of his short legs to the bed and shook Tom by the shoulder, waking him to a conference of state, while Dumai went out.

There were good grounds to be wary, to consider the matter carefully before taking any action. Punitive expeditions to the Ramu were nothing new. The government had sent out several well-armed parties in the frail hope of catching and disciplining Anitok. Not that he and Tom found these particularly troublesome. Every movement of such expeditions was known and reported before ever a foot touched shore. The two raiders and their retinue merely took to the mountains and waited until the white men wearied of the chase, which was never too long in those sweaty, pest-infested swamps and jungles.

Naturally Tom took care to see that Anitok never molested the minions of the government. But only those and traders, prospectors, or bird-of-paradise hunters who appeared wary and

strongly armed were immune from attack. All others fared less well.

One quite recent and bitter experience, however, had clearly demonstrated the perils of judging by appearances, besides inspiring in them an awesome respect for weapons heretofore outside their knowledge.

A harmless-looking Japanese pearling lugger, lying peacefully at anchor in the river mouth, had not only turned the tables of ambush upon them but up-ended them, probably from motives of revenge for some murdered comrades.

Tom had planned the dawn attack well, sending Anitok with a picked force, and staying in the background himself, as he usually did. But the very first flight of blow darts, poisoned by dipping the tips in a decomposed corpse, brought a murderous response from the schooner. Her decks exploded with a staccato rattle from two weapons that fired without stopping, thin streaks of flame licking out into the darkness and mowing down the attacking force. Fourteen of Anitok's men died in the space of a few seconds; the leader's own escape was only by the narrowest margin. It was a salutary lesson—to Anitok anyway.

The mysterious advent of these new people, apparently without any means of transportation, and according to the reports unarmed, made him suspect a trap of some sort. The scouts reported that the strangers were thirteen in number, including one small one who lay in a hut. They were hungry, that was obvious. Helpless too, as far as it was possible to judge. And they seemed to have no reason or purpose behind their presence in the land.

Kanaka Tom listened, lying motionless and staring at the ceiling, but all that he heard convinced him that Anitok should go and sum up the situation for himself.

Without question Anitok followed his advice, and Tom resumed his nap. Led by the spies, the tiny chieftain went silently and hid in the jungle. When he saw the white woman he stared at her for hours. His pulse beat fast and he clenched and unclenched his powerful little hands, for her hair was nearly the same color as that of the woman who had caused him such painful humiliation in the house in Sydney—the big white woman he had never forgotten.

She was not big enough or fat enough, and her breasts seemed

a bit small for his taste. But the smooth pale skin he could see through the ragged garments aroused in him such a fierce desire that he knew he must possess her. That would be a triumph in more ways than one; possession of a woman like this would sweeten the bitter memory of that humiliation which had never ceased to rankle in his savage little breast. True, he was a man of great power in the land now, but he could well imagine the unique distinction, the added prestige, that would accrue from the addition of such a fine big wife to the five tiny ones who already lived in his house. Particularly if, like the other in Sydney, she happened to have teeth of the shining yellow metal.

Reporting back to Tom, they agreed upon a plan and called a council of warriors. Secretly Tom had made up his mind at once that, if there was a white woman within reach, he himself, and not Anitok, would take her. This was one expedition on which the Kanaka, contrary to his usual custom, would go himself. He had long since grown weary of the half-sized Pygmy women. But in the interests of harmony in attack, he was careful to hide this from Anitok.

Accompanied by 20 armed warriors, a formal visit, supposedly friendly, would be paid upon the strangers. It would not be hard to lull them into a sense of false security, he said, and little danger existed, for it was unlikely the white men would commence hostilities first. Thus, if it could be determined the party was as weak and poorly armed as suspected, a sudden overwhelming onslaught would be made at a given signal. That signal was actually to come from Tom—a mere folding of the arms, as if in weariness. Seeing this, Anitok was to throw his spear upon the ground—for it was he who must at all times remain the leader in the eyes of his people.

The white men were to be disposed of first, Anitok instructed his warriors. "And kill them," he ordered savagely, "so that they know they die." Kanaka Tom stood by in impassive silence as the words were spoken.

If possible, the big Kanakas were to be taken for slaves. Or killed, if they resisted. There would be plunder, he guaranteed his listeners; although it was probably hidden now, the white man always traveled with valuable possessions. Of the white woman he commanded that she be spared.

The garramuts were taken down from the rafters of the long council hut where they hung in time of peace. When the tough crocodile skin was pulled taut at the ends, the drums were beaten and a message boomed out of the length and breadth of the Great River estuary: "*Anitok speaks. Strangers have come to kill us. Prepare.*"

Perhaps it was native cunning, perhaps the result of Tom's contact with modern man, that made Anitok appreciative of the potent value of the record—it was not he who had been the aggressor, it might one day be argued.

To those waiting with grim anticipation in the clearing, Anitok's arrival was staged with a nice sense of the dramatic. No attempt was made to hide the sounds of his approach. There was the terrifying sound of purposeful movement in the undergrowth, and suddenly there appeared out of the thickest part of the jungle, from a quarter where no paths led off, four fierce, Lilliputian men, naked, except that each wore a G-string made of vegetable fiber and a ludicrous cylindrical gourd sheath held fast against the belly from crotch to navel.

But there was nothing ludicrous about their weapons. Holding overhead the carefully carved bows, of surprising length in proportion to their own height, and arrows so deadly as to make a mere scratch from the poisoned tip fatal, they advanced a few steps.

"Anitok! Pe-an!" they called out, repeating the guttural words several times.

Then they brandished the weapons and flung them conspicuously on the ground—a stratagem designed by Tom to accustom the strangers to the sight of weapons, and by thus discarding them, but not too far, to indicate peaceful intentions.

Immediately after this they drew forth the stone axes held in their G-strings and rapidly began hacking a fairly wide pathway into the clearing.

To Shamus the significance of this ritual, when already a half-dozen well-defined tracks opened into the clearing, was obscure, but he motioned the others to draw nearer the center of the open space and wait.

There came a sharp staccato rattle on the garramuts, and

Anitok stepped out, with a tall Kanaka beside him, towering like a giant above his ridiculously short body, and flanked by a bodyguard.

In a sudden surge which was almost painful, Shamus's heart leaped with hope, for on the chest of the tall Kanaka there was tattooed the figure of a naked woman, and as the man took an erect stance and threw his shoulders back, the woman seemed to smile in welcome. There could be no doubt about it—this was the tattooing which Father Kirshner had tried, with embarrassment, to describe. This must be Kanaka Tom, Father Kirshner's friend, and capable of speaking a little English and enough Pidgin so that they could readily understand each other. But for a moment he held his peace, thinking rapidly how best to exploit his knowledge, and gazed with wonder at the monstrously grotesque figure of the pgymy tyrant, so small, that had he stood in front of the Kanaka, the head and shoulders of the woman tattooed on the latter's chest would still be visible.

Anitok's carefully frizzled white hair, powdered with lime, and sprouting a coxcomb of bird-of-paradise plumes, was standing out almost a foot around the grotesque little face. He was ornamented with some finely woven hair armlets around his wrists and ankles, a necklet of polished human teeth, and a breast decoration made of two monster boar's tusks, forming a circle.

Inside the circle there hung a carved black palmwood piece, inlaid with three rare seashells, the significance of which, had Cleo realized it, might easily have caused her to faint from pure astonishment. For it announced to the world that Anitok was a lover about to take another wife, and between it and the wearing of the two hibiscus flowers, implying that anyone else's wife would do, quite a marked difference existed.

Pausing to allow his followers to gather round him, he raised his left arm stiffly into the air. "Ahoy," he called, while Kanaka Tom stood in stoical silence, making his own secret appraisal of the white woman.

The sound of the bizarre words, accosting their ears in the throaty, cacophonous voice, and issuing from the dwarfish, spider-like body, had a startling effect upon the taut and desperate people in the clearing.

Even though Shamus had spoken of Pygmies, the sight of this horde of fierce, powerfully built little men, gnome-like epitomes of all evil, took them off guard.

Each individual had vaguely conjured up his own picture of what a Pygmy would look like, but the visual reality of something imagined is almost invariably a bit shocking.

"For Christ's sake!" whispered Jimmy. "Midgets!"

Shamus, wearing an expression of mild surprise, strolled over a few paces from the longboat and leaned casually upon a tree stump, as if pleased by the prospect of whiling away an hour or so in an idle chat. Whitey and Jim shot a quick look at each other and tacitly decided to stick close to him. Cleo started to follow, but Shamus motioned her back.

In spite of every effort at nonchalance, Whitey was pale and rigid. His walk was stiff-legged and he carried his shoulders hunched slightly forward, hands hanging loosely at his sides.

Jimmy's hair was standing straight up on his scalp like a hair-brush. His ragged, sweat-streaked clothes clung close to his skin, while the thin rivulets of sweat zigzagging down from his hair and into his eyes went unnoticed.

The Kanaka crew, with Tulare and Alaman in the lead, silently took their places beside and a little behind the group of white people.

"Ahoy!" Shamus called back in a cool voice.

Anitok had dropped his arm, but remained motionless. His lieutenants shifted uneasily from one foot to the other and looked at him for a sign. But Anitok was a trifle taken aback; this calm, disarming, friendly reception was hardly expected. Still Tom, whom Shamus had hoped would speak, remained silent.

"You fella savvy talk, eh?" Shamus asked, in as friendly a voice as he could muster.

Anitok's eyes darted from side to side, but still he could see no sign of firearms. Out of his practiced eye he could catch brief glimpses of those warriors left behind in the jungle, taking up hidden positions surrounding the clearing. Shamus saw them too, but pretended not to. Anitok looked up at Kanaka Tom, and, with their bodyguard and the four who had originally announced their coming, they took a few steps nearer, and again stopped.

Then Kanaka Tom spoke. "Me savvy talk. Anitok speak. I tell you. You speak. I tell Anitok. Belong wha' name you come Ramu?"

Shamus hesitated. Should he reveal his friendship for Father Kirshner and his knowledge of Tom's identity, or wait? Precisely how much did they know of the shipwreck and their present helpless plight? No, he would bluff for a moment.

"What's matter?" he said sharply. "The Ramu belongs to you?"

Tom translated to Anitok swiftly, and the latter drew himself up to his full four feet six and pounded himself fiercely on the chest, chattering rapidly.

"He say, that's right. Place belong him," Tom said briefly, nodding his head toward Anitok.

Shamus took another tack. "Our friend, an old Taubada died. We put him in the ground."

Tom nodded, translated; Anitok nodded curtly, and spoke rapidly. They were both well aware of this; spies had reported the strange procedure of planting the dead man in the earth, instead of the normal practice of placing the body on a high bamboo platform out of the reach of crabs and rats, or leaving him above ground and turning him daily so that decomposition would be the more rapid.

"Anitok say for ground, how much you pay?" demanded Tom.

"For ground?" Shamus's mind worked at high pressure as he stalled his answer.

The demand for payment on Mr. Swartz's last resting-place was based upon the soundest legal premise, for the very foundation of all Kanaka law is the ownership of land. A plot of earth, no matter what size, or for what purpose its use, must be bought and paid for—or there is trouble.

Never shifting his gaze Shamus half turned. "I'm going to have to give him a knife," he muttered, but in a mild tone. "Whitey—go and get Tulare's."

"The hell—we can't!" Whitey protested. "We gotta have it—or how are we going to finish—?"

"Get it." In the superficially expressionless voice there was that to make Whitey obey without another word.



Shamus turned back to Tom. "I pay—" he began, and stopped short at a certain expression he had caught on Anitok's face.

The tiny savage was looking at Cleo. With a horrible clarity, the one fleeting glimpse was enough to bare the secret intent in the savage little soul, as clearly as if it had been written on his visage. The face of Tom, whose technique with men and with women was better, was expressionless.

The revelation in Anitok's face was so startling, Shamus had great difficulty retaining his so vital, cool composure. Incredible! The little black ape—what a weird, mal-inspired passion!

Tulare returned with Whitey, bringing the knife. As in silence the big Kanaka offered it to Shamus, there was no mistaking how much he hated parting with it. He had taken care to wrench it free from the spear handle, for which Shamus mutely blessed him; the blade so clumsily fastened to a shaft would have been very revealing of impotence.

He tossed the knife to the ground at Tom's feet.

A momentary gleam of covetousness came over Anitok's face and he half leaned forward as if to pick it up, but rapid words from Tom made him straighten up again. Then, with careful deliberation, Tom put his toe against the handle and kicked it spinning back toward Shamus.

"Anitok say no good," he grunted.

Shamus thought swiftly. He knew the value of a knife to a New Guinea native and refusal of it looked bad. After all, it would be theirs anyway—later, if—

Without turning, he said, "Cleo—your bangle bracelet."

She came up behind him swiftly, slipped the bracelet into his hand, and managed to give his hand a quick pressure as she did so, then, ignoring his signs to her to retire, stood tensely beside him. Shamus flung the bracelet tinkling through the air and Tom caught it deftly, examined it briefly, and handed it to Anitok. Let him have the thing, he thought contemptuously. It was too small for himself, and he would have the wrist from which it came later—

Anitok's eyes gleamed as he fondled it; then he spoke rapidly to Tom.

"More," Tom said gutturally. "The woman. He pay for her. He give food, water, big canoe."

Shamus's face went white and the muscles over his cheekbones began to twitch as he looked at Tom. Tom shrugged. Shamus's gaze went to Anitok. His thoughts raced feverishly, driven to a cold, calculating calm in strange contrast to the fire of anger which surged through him. Swiftly he estimated the distance which separated him from the horrible little animal. Would a sudden spring enable him to reach him and choke him to death before he himself was killed? But he knew how useless it was. Even if he succeeded, which was almost impossible, what good would it do? The Pygmies, devoid of their leader, would treat Cleo no more kindly than would Anitok himself. It was time now to try the name of Father Kirshner for whatever good it might do. Carefully keeping his hands at his side, for he knew how any New Guinea native will become furious if he is pointed at, he spoke in a firm slow voice, looking directly at the tall interpreter.

"Kanakan Tom," he said. "I know you. You are friend of the big Taubada with the beard—Father Kirshner. You are good man. Kirshner has told me. I, too, am friend of Kirshner. The woman is friend of Kirshner—like the young Tauberina in the white hat who saved you once from your sickness. Do you want the anger of Kirshner? You know what it will surely be if harm comes to us—especially this woman whom Anitok says he wants."

He watched Tom's face closely, but could see no sign to tell him what effect his speech had. For a long tense moment there was only silence, and then as Tom began to translate to Anitok a most unfortunate thing happened. Cleo had heard Tom's demand without clearly understanding it. Now, as Shamus used the words which called attention to the monstrous request, it suddenly swept across her comprehension.

"Me?" she murmured, dazedly, as the full implication of the bizarre demand dawned on her. Dumfounded, she stared down at the tiny man. "That thing!" Then suddenly, in spite of her terror, or perhaps because of it, her taut nerves snapped and flooded into a gale of laughter, hysterical, incredulous, derisive.

The sound had an immediate effect on Anitok. Poignant recollections of another white woman's derision surged through him—mocking and vicious. The acute memory of that humiliation

was accompanied by a wave of rage and frustration. The people were helpless, powerless, yet they had the temerity to deride him!

Suddenly he exploded, like a minute yet terrible volcano. In fury, his deep guttural voice became harshly strident and high-pitched; as Hitler-like he strode up and down in the middle of the clearing, haranguing his people, and speaking in violent asides directly to Tom, who remained silent and enigmatic. At last he came to a stop beside Tom. Tom spoke a few brief words to him which only they could understand, then addressed Shamus.

"Kirshner too far away," he said stolidly. "No good now. Me Anitok man. This place not belong you. All belong Anitok, all land, all earth, all trees, all water. You steal ground. He come this one time like friend. Because you give him present he give you little time for think. Now he get up, he go along place. Better you think quick. Next time he come once more. Only once. Take payment. Take woman."

With Anitok he turned abruptly, and together they broke through the ranks of the warriors, who split aside to make way and then followed, the dark jungle swallowing them up as completely as pebbles dropped in a deep pool.

### *Chapter Seventeen: WHITE MAN'S MAGIC*

SLOWLY the group walked into Cleo's hut, their minds all busy with the same thoughts, but no one said anything for a moment. What was there to say? They all knew that they had been close to death, and, though the imminent blow had been withdrawn for the moment, no one knew when it might threaten again, and whether next time they would be so fortunate.

It was Jodo, lying against the wall, pale with fright who broke the silence. "Well—when are they coming back?" he asked, his voice a terrified croak.

Shamus shrugged his shoulders. "Your guess is as good as mine," he said wearily.

"I heard most of it," Jodo went on. "But I didn't get the part about what he wanted to be paid for. What's he supposed to have given us—the keys to the city? I don't get it."

When it was explained to him, Jodo looked amazed. "Well,

"what are we waiting for?" he asked with harsh asperity. "It's simple, isn't it? He wants the ground. Okay—give him back the ground. Who the hell wants it, anyway?"

Singularly, the notion had occurred to no one. Yet, in spite of the cold logic of the proposal, everyone looked slightly startled.

"He's right," said Whitey after a moment, staring doubtfully at his feet. "I guess Doc wouldn't mind, at that. Would he, or what?"

"No, I guess not." With a frowning smile Jim spoke judicially. "In fact, if he was here, I don't think he'd take 'no' for an answer. No, he wouldn't mind."

"But couldn't—" Cleo was looking confused. "It seems wrong somehow. Couldn't we—couldn't he be dug up and buried somewhere else? So they wouldn't know? No, I guess not. . . . There isn't anywhere—if he were buried anywhere else it'd be the same thing. But those horrible little men—why do they want his grave? It seems—"

"Why don't you get wise?" said Jodo with weak exasperation. "Do *you* care what happens to you when you're dead? I don't—you can do anything you want with me. Use me for fertilizer or anything you want—I don't give a damn. But while I'm alive, I give a damn. And while you're alive, so do you. Get wise to yourselves, why don't you!"

The outburst brought a brief silence, broken by Whitey. "What say, Cap? You think it's okay?"

"Perfectly," said Shamus calmly. "Perfectly okay. But unfortunately, it's by no means as simple as that. You might as well know that that little rat, the chief, doesn't care about the ground. I don't know what he wants, but—"

"Yes, you do. You know!" Jodo struggled to raise himself up, but fell back again in pain, glaring at Shamus vehemently. "He wants Cleo. He said so. I got that."

There was another pause. As the silence lengthened an acute awkwardness pervaded the hut.

Finally Whitey gave a quick impatient snort. "So what?"

"Yeah, so what! So what!" Jodo's voice rose in shrill mimicry. "I'm just telling you what he wants. That's what!"

"Ach!" Whitey made an exclamation of disgust. He turned to Shamus. "Can't we—isn't it worth taking a chance to make a

break for it, Cap? I don't like just sitting around on my pratt waiting to be killed and not being able to do anything about it. I'd sooner take a chance and blow—wouldn't you, or what?"

Shamus shrugged. "It depends solely upon one's choice of evils. As far as I'm concerned, you should do whatever your impulses tell you, at this point. Personally, I prefer to die fighting, rather than be hunted down and killed in the mangrove swamps or eaten by crocodiles or both. I might try offering them the longboat—but I doubt if it would do any good. Why should it? When they know they can kill us and take everything we have—or rather haven't."

Again the deep silence of despair settled over the group. Jodo said nothing, but his ferret eyes darted from one face to another.

"Sure is one hell of a way to die." Jim spoke at last in a low voice. "But I'll lay you odds on one thing—there's going to be a whole bunch of 'em come with me." He snarled his travesty of a smile, a baleful gleam in his good eye.

"Don't suppose I would have lasted much longer anyway," ruminated Whitey. He hesitated, then reached out and put a long thin hand on Cleo's shoulder. "Too bad, kid," he muttered awkwardly. "You're kinda—young." He shot an awkward glance at Shamus and jerking his head at him, added, "So's your feller—too bad for both of you. . . ." He turned and left the hut quickly.

Surprised, for he actually believed no one was aware of what was between himself and Cleo, Shamus said quickly, "Well—let's get back to work. Might as well keep the front up. . . ."

Everyone began trooping out. But as Cleo, the last to leave, stooped to go through the low doorway, Jodo made a hissing sound. "Come here," he muttered. She turned and came back to his bed.

He was lying perfectly immobile, his pale, myopic eyes gleaming up at her, two narrow, penetrating shafts. "I got a word to say to you, sister," he grated between his teeth.

"Go ahead—say it."

Cleo's expression, usually so brightly mobile, was now composed and hard. In the sharp tone of her voice a note of bravado might have been detected, as if she were already aware and prepared for anything he was about to say.

"Lemme see, five of us, not to mention a bunch of good niggers, got to die. Because *you're* standing pat on the old formula—a woman's honor. You're willing to stand by and maybe, *maybe* get killed yourself, all on account of you haven't got the guts to be honest! You could save us all if you weren't so goddamned phony. You think your honor, I guess that's what you call it, is much more important than the lives of all of us. You heard what the guy said—he'd get all the rest of us out of here—if you stayed."

Cleo drew a deep breath and looked down at him. She was trembling slightly, but apart from that a steely glint had come into her eye. "I see. You want to leave me here so you can get out yourself, is that it?"

"You're damn right! So does everyone else. Except they're all too hypocritical, too goddamned afraid to say so."

"I don't believe it! There's more to it than that—they wouldn't!"

"You think not? I'd like to take any one of them off by himself, where he'd be sure none of the others could hear, and try him out. Anyone of 'em'd level then—in a hurry. You'd find out."

"I don't believe it. There's more to human decency than that. There's a thing called self-respect too, they couldn't—"

"That's where you're wrong, sister. That's the kind of stuff every dame yells when she's backed up against a wall and nobody's playing favorites. She's fine when everything's going okay for her. When things go wrong she ducks down behind those old, old catchwords—honor, self-respect, where's your manhood?—all the rest of those tired bromides. But don't give *me* that bull. You know the score as well as I do—if you'd be willing to stay here with these niggers for a month or more you'd save all our lives, including your own. You'd be rescued—they'd send a plane in to get you back. Yeah, I know. They'd lay you in the meantime. So what? If I know you, you've laid worse. And what of it? Might even change your luck. . . ."

"Why, you—!" Cleo's voice broke and rose suddenly. "If you didn't have that broken hip—" Then she paused, and when she spoke again she had regained control of herself. "I wouldn't have expected anything else from you. I just feel sorry for you,

that's all."

"Don't feel sorry for me, sister—I'm only sorry for myself. I know that. Sure. I don't like to think of my head lying on the ground dripping the way those other three were. And all our heads'll look like that unless you come through. God knows you've given enough of it away in your time. What sort of a price you holding out for now?"

Cleo was looking at him steadily, a spot of color, which was not from the sun, high on each cheekbone the only sign of her emotion. When she spoke it was in a low tone which she was trying to keep dispassionate.

"You're crippled," she said, "and I ought to remember that. But listen to me. If you live you'll be crippled the rest of your life. But that's not the worst of it. You shouldn't be kept alive—because your mind is much more crippled than your body. You say the others would be willing to leave me here to save their own lives—"

She was stopped by the sudden stark fear and fury which leaped out of Jodo's eyes, and by the harsh, terror-stricken words which came from his lips.

"So that's what's cooking, is it?" he screamed. "You're fixing it up now that *I* ought to die, that *I'm* the one to be left behind, so there'll be room in the boat for the rest of you. That's what you're telling that jerk you laid—that I 'shouldn't be kept alive' so he'll be willing to run out on me! Well, forget it! Goddam it, I may be lying here with a broken hip, but I can still outsmart the gang of you if I try. If that's what you're thinking of, you may see something happen around here, kid, that none of you would have thought of. If you think—" He stopped suddenly and the wily look of cunning which had crept into his eyes was replaced by the terror which flooded back into them. "Listen! Here they come!"

Outside a sudden tattoo had begun, a fast hollow tempo that was instantly taken up on all sides, until the very walls of the hut reverberated with the vibrations.

Cleo went quickly to the door as Shamus came running up.

Jodo gave a high-pitched cackle of mingled terror and derision. "The woman always pays!" he sneered. "Of all the bull I ever heard, that's the topper. Pays what? A dozen of us going to

get killed—yet the woman always pays!” Suddenly his voice rose to a shrill scream. “Here’s your chance, you cheap, selfish hooker! Go ahead and pay!”

Cleo stepped out into the sunlight to meet Shamus. Gratefully she took his hand and stood beside him, pale and taut as a ship’s cable. Shamus looked at the dark sky, as if he had not heard the garramuts.

“It’s going to rain,” he said. Once before he had nearly died in the rain, he was thinking. He wished that he were alone—this time, he was convinced, there would be no reprieve.

But, strangely, though the drums pounded insistently, maddeningly, there was no second visit from Anitok and his men that day. Yet if Shamus, or any of the others in the clearing, were hopeful because of that, their hope would have been shattered had they been able to see what was happening in Anitok’s village.

Together Anitok and Kanaka Tom sat in the latter’s hut, from which Dumai had been unceremoniously expelled as soon as they had returned. Anitok was plainly angry and disgruntled.

“Why did we not finish it while they stood there helplessly before us?” he asked, in the language which only he and Tom understood. He shook the wrist on which Cleo’s bangle bracelet hung, delighted at the gentle tinkling which it gave forth. “I could even now be having her.”

Tom scowled and shook his head. “You are unaware of the cleverness of the white man,” he said. “When he seems the more harmless and at ease it is when he has the most strength hidden. Did you not see the leaves stacked about the boat? Undoubtedly there was hidden beneath them the chattering monkey gun which spoke from the ship of the yellow man. Do you think I am a fool to allow us to be struck with such a one? The white man was waiting only for some move of anger on our part to make it hit us. No, my friend. There is a better way than that. Have you forgotten the promise which you made to Kutun?”

He was speaking of the ruler of the powerful Arane people, who lived a hundred miles to the southeast. Between them and Anitok’s people there existed a precarious peace, based upon the respect which each had for the prowess of the other. As a part of the pact of friendship upon which they had agreed some months before, each had promised that, when next either of



them was given the opportunity to plunder a company of white people, the other would be allowed to participate and share in the spoils.

"The matter is very simple," Kanaka Tom went on. "There is no need for us to take chances. I shall send Dumai with a message to Kután telling him to come and join us. We shall then yield the honor of the attack to Kután and allow *his* people to face the monkey gun. When the monkey has spit out all of its teeth we shall close in in safety. Meanwhile the garramuts will remind the white men of our presence."

"But the woman is to be mine," Anitok grunted, shaking the bangle bracelet delicately.

"Of course," Kanaka Tom murmured smoothly.

He had been thinking for some months that it was time for him to put into operation the final stage of the plan which had hatched in his fertile brain while he and Anitok had been shoveling coal aboard the *Finshafen*. Anitok had been mostly useful. But now it was time for Kanaka Tom to receive his due and take openly the Number One place he had always planned for himself.

Rising, he left the hut, called Dumai, and in words which only the two of them could hear, gave him instructions and sent him off swiftly into the jungle.

For four days and four nights the garramuts kept up their insane and ceaseless chatter, a maddening sound to the little group in the clearing who went on working feverishly on the longboat, working against time and the enervating drag of near exhaustion. All were now suffering from malnutrition which was nearing the point of starvation, for with the garramuts ringing in their ears from close at hand, Shamus had stopped Alaman's daily trips into the jungle in search of taro and sago. Their diet consisted almost exclusively now of what few mud crabs they could catch.

For four days and four nights Anitok chafed and fretted in his village, pacing from hut to hut in the daytime, tossing restlessly at night. But when he complained to Kanaka Tom, the latter merely said, "It is far to Kután. It is not yet time."

On the fifth day Anitok could stand it no longer.

"That slave!" he grunted to Kanaka Tom. "Perhaps he has

run away. Perhaps he has been killed by the Arane people themselves. Why do we wait? The white people are helpless. They have no monkey gun."

Tom looked at him keenly for a long moment in silence. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "So," he said. "We go."

He strode into his hut and, removing his bed, dug beneath it. Anitok stood by and suddenly began to tremble. He knew what Tom had hidden there, and he both feared and coveted it more than anything else in New Guinea—save the white woman on the beach. From the earth Tom took a steel box which he had stolen on the *Finshafen*. Opening it he took out a revolver, also stolen aboard the *Finshafen*. Tom had told Anitok all about it. Unfortunately he had no ammunition for it save that which was already in the chambers, but there were six deaths there—enough to wipe out the four white men, including the small one who was hurt, and leave two for another emergency. Tom had always said that he was saving it for something very important.

For a moment Anitok was afraid. If Tom was willing to bring out this most dreaded of all things now, could it mean any less than that he was sure that there was a monkey gun waiting for them and that he needed this to fight it? He lifted his hand to lay it on Tom's arm, almost ready to say that they would wait for Kutan's people, but as he did the bangles on Cleo's bracelet jingled and a great wave of lust for the white woman swept over him. No. They would go now and take her.

Again the little warriors filled the clearing in ominous silence, and then Anitok and Kanaka Tom pushed their way through them and stood facing the group of white people and waiting Kanakas. Shamus had dropped his work of calking as soon as he had heard their approach. He whispered to Cleo, telling her to stay back, and walked slowly forward, with as great a show of nonchalance as possible, to lean against the tree stump where he had taken his place during the former visit. He noticed the revolver in Kanaka Tom's G-string, but quickly shifted his gaze lest they should see that he had noticed and was afraid.

Shamus studied the faces of Tom and Anitok closely. What he read in Anitok's left him no hope. There was not even a pretense of friendliness there—only animal passion, as the little tyrant's eyes swept back to Cleo, and impatience, as though he

intended to get the bloody preliminaries over as soon as possible. Nor did his companion offer anything positive in the way of hope. Tom's face was inscrutable. It was neither more nor less friendly than it had been on the first visit, as he stood silently, his right hand close to the revolver, watching Anitok.

Anitok nudged him and spoke rapidly. Tom looked at Shamus. "He asks whether you are ready to give the woman?"

Shamus made no answer. An all-consuming weight seemed to drag at him. He felt his every muscle go tense for the rush he hoped would carry him to Anitok.

And then he heard quick steps behind him and turning saw Cleo, half-running, coming forward, her eyes staring straight ahead, her mouth set in a grim, straight line, her face deathly pale. She was brushing past Shamus, almost without looking at him, when his hand shot out and seized her wrist.

"Are you mad?" he grated in a low voice.

She looked up at him swiftly, her eyes clouding for a moment with a pitiful appeal. "Let me go!" she whispered. "They'll think I mean it! And I can get that big bastard's gun. If I don't—well, I'm not worth all the rest of you! Let me go!"

Anitok's eyes had widened with eagerness as she had come forward. Now, as he saw Shamus's hand grip her wrist the more tightly, he began muttering angrily to Kanaka Tom, and fingering the bone dagger in his G-string. Tom, watching Anitok closely, kept his right hand near the revolver.

And in that moment, when no more than a split second seemed to stand between life and violent death, a most extraordinary thing occurred.

First, the deathly stillness of the clearing was broken as if a strange electric current had run through it. Almost simultaneously a loud clap of thunder shook the heavens. An excited jabbering suddenly broke out among the crouching warriors. Anitok himself looked as if he had been turned to stone. His eyes bulged, his jaw dropped down on his chest. He stared, immobile. Only Kanaka Tom stood as he had before, silent, impassive, seeming to wait for Shamus's answer.

Suddenly a mass of the little men turned and fled helter-skelter into the jungle, as if pursued by devils of their own particular hell. All the others fell back, horror and alarm on their

faces.

A second, more violent roll of thunder boomed forth.

Bewildered, Shamus thought that there must be some strange connection between the thunder and the fright of the Pygmies. Then, remembering that, during the rainy season, this was almost a daily occurrence in New Guinea, he turned and his eyes followed the direction of Anitok's frozen gaze. But at first he could see no cause for the commotion.

The boat's crew stood huddled by the stockade, headed by Tulare, poised for their last defense. Whitey crouched near the longboat, ready to jump for his club. Cleo had collapsed at Shamus's feet. Nearby, Jimmy—

In a flash enlightenment came.

Jimmy, scared stiff and sweating violently, had removed his glass eye, as he so often did in moments of distress, and was wiping it off on his shirtsleeve!

For a moment Shamus could hardly credit the ludicrous fantasy of the thing. But he knew the primitive mind. And if Fate chose to be whimsical, this was no time to hesitate. It was a slender hope—he must make the most of it.

He strode over to Jimmy. "Your eye!" he whispered between clenched teeth. "When I tell you—stick it back in again!"

Seizing Jimmy by the arm, he drew him into the center of the clearing by the tree stump—with considerable ceremony.

Addressing himself directly to the still astounded Anitok, instead of to his interpreter, he announced in a loud voice, "This is a Taubada of magic. Look!"

Tom translated calmly, but Anitok shook with fear.

At the quick nudge Jimmy, with a hand that trembled, plopped his eye back into its socket. He blinked a couple of times, and stared back owl-eyed at the savages.

If one has never even conceived of the physical possibility of a removable eye, a demonstration can be extremely eerie. A man walking into a crowded night club with his head under his arm would constitute a no more startling spectacle. A mingled gasp of incredulity and fear swept the onlookers.

Shamus let a few seconds go by to size up the effect and allow it to gather momentum. Then: "Give it to me!" he muttered urgently. "Slower this time."

Jimmy obeyed. Forcing a cool smile, Shamus took the orb and held it up for display between thumb and forefinger. Walking forward, his arm outstretched, he suddenly proffered it to Anitok, who started back as if from a snake. Then he placed it conspicuously on the tree stump before him.

"This eye," he intoned, "sees everything. It is magic. All day and all night it tells me all. Nothing is hidden."

Kanaka Tom translated impressively and in a steady voice.

A low murmur arose. Anitok stammered something. Tom made no reply, nor did he translate to Shamus.

With the suave gesture of a master magician, Shamus pointed dramatically at Whitey. "And this Taubada," he drew him alongside Jimmy, "is another man of magic."

Tom translated, not moving, nor giving any indication of his own feeling.

"Your teeth!" Shamus muttered in a fast whisper. "I'll try it—slowly, so they can see—"

Whitey gave him a dazed look. Like an automaton he reached up into his mouth and drew forth his lower plate.

The sight of this last marvel—the gleaming molars grinning alongside the magic eye—was enough.

Panic gripped the little men. Another long-drawn-out murmur arose from their midst as they peered forward. Some threw down their weapons, others fell flat on their faces and began crawling away. Still more fled outright into the jungle. Only Anitok and Tom were left.

Once more the thunder boomed out, sonorous, rotund and portentous. The sky exploded; pelting rain began flooding the clearing.

Anitok cast one more glance at the tree stump. The eye, wet, pale blue and savage, the thin artificial red streaks of blood running across the white, gleamed back at him ferociously. He fled, following his tiny warriors.

For a moment Kanaka Tom stood there alone, his face impassive, looking from Shamus to the eye, then back to Shamus. Finally he turned and began to walk slowly in the direction of the retreating Pygmies, all of whom had by now disappeared. As he reached the first bushes, he paused and, turning to look directly at Shamus, the corners of his lips turned up in what

could only be described as a cynical grin. Then he, too, was swallowed up by the jungle.

A moment later there came from the jungle the sound of a single shot. Then absolute stillness.

### *Chapter Eighteen:* NIGHTMARE

THE longboat had been moved from the clearing and now lay chocked on the beach, nearly ready for sea. She had been filled with water and tested for leaks. None showed, but a trial launching revealed copious little rivulets of water streaming in along her topsides.

As Shamus feared, with a full load of passengers her displacement was so great that the gunwale topped the water's surface by a mere three or four precarious inches of freeboard—far too little, everyone knew, for such a voyage as lay ahead. So she had been hauled ashore again, and all hands worked feverishly at completing a makeshift recalking job: sago mixed with clay half dried and hammered home on top of a fairly absorbent tree bark. It was a job that had to be done, and fast.

How long the patchwork would last, what weather it would withstand, was another moot question. Anyway, remarked Whitey sardonically, in a pinch they could always eat the calking—it could only be an improvement over their previous diet.

He was referring, of course, to the period before the Eye wrought such a fabulous change in their condition. Ever since it had been placed on guard on the tree stump, almost a week ago, gift offerings of food began appearing. Alaman had found them first, piled up and placed along the jungle edges opposite the tree stump: taro, yams, the bitter fruit of the pandanus and bread fruit. No meat or fish; apparently the Eye was regarded as a vegetarian.

No one knew how the offerings got there, or precisely to whom they were made, whether to the Eye itself, or its custodian Jimmy or Whitey. And it is certain none cared, except perhaps Shamus who, dubious and suspecting poison or some other trickery, at first refused to allow the stuff to be eaten. But soon the pangs of near starvation, and the steady regularity of the tempting food, proved too much to resist and it was gobbled ravenously.

And though the derelicts could still scarcely credit the ludicrous potency of their protective deity—the Eye—each one paid it secret tribute in heartfelt thankfulness. Its helpfulness had begun on the very day when it had first made its appearance, for it had not only driven the Pygmies back into the jungle, thereby, as Shamus firmly believed, saving their lives, or at least giving them a respite, but had made many of the little warriors throw down their weapons before they left so that now the little band in the clearing was well equipped with spears, bows, and arrows and able to meet an equal number of their adversaries on almost an equal footing—save, Shamus thought with foreboding, for that revolver under Kanaka Tom's G-string. And whenever he thought of that he remembered with ever-increasing questioning, that single shot which had startled all of them shortly after the Pygmy band disappeared. What had been its work, he could not guess. But he kept his questioning to himself, and no one else saw fit to mention the matter.

The nervous tension began to relax a little, in spite of the stealthy unrelenting vigil which all believed was being kept upon them. Those in the clearing, clothes hanging in shreds, tattered and weary, dragged themselves around, working like automatons in the boiling sun and stifling jungle heat. At night they fought the voracious mosquitoes and myriad other pests which descended in hordes at dusk.

For the Eye, a little mound of clay had been molded on top of the tree stump, and on this it nestled regally, like a rare and precious jewel, or more aptly, a small golf ball on a tee.

Shamus in his wisdom and keen grasp of the situation, instituted daily prayers to it, kneeling before the stump morning and night, or whenever he thought he detected a fairly numerous audience on the sidelines. But for the fact that they were too weary of spirit to protest, the others might have balked at taking a part in such nonsense. Not the Kanakas, however. Puzzled at first, they soon entered into the devotions with sincerity, even fervor. Led by Tulare, they prostrated themselves before the stump, chanting the ancient choruses sung by primitive forebears to savage tribal deities since the darkest ages of Melanesia. It was not hard to tell that, for them at least, the Eye had assumed an intrinsic significance, perhaps religious, perhaps a product of

fear and superstition, but certainly potent.

The sole reactionary and skeptic, Jodo, lay looking out of his doorway, watching the rites. "Why don't you take up a collection?" he sneered at Cleo one afternoon. "Or get your guy to—he's just the type. Jesus—what hooey."

"That's right, darling. But it's saved our lives, that's all."

"For the time being, yeah. But they'll be back. They'll be back—and when they come—" His voice trailed off into silence, and a sly, secretive look entered his eyes, as though a plan were forming behind them which he would take care to reveal to no one.

In time to catch the last words, Shamus came in, followed by Jim and Whitey. He looked weary but there was a new light, a light of hope and eagerness, shining in his eyes. He strode over to the corner of the hut to help himself to a drink of water from the pandanus-frond container hanging from the rafters. Then he came quickly to Cleo and took both her hands in his.

"Good news, my dear!" He spoke in a tone of suppressed excitement, smiling. "By the looks of the boat, with luck we'll get away tomorrow, at most the day after. If they just keep away till then, if the leaks are even partly stopped, we'll leave—probably have to bail all the way, but that's all right. There's only one thing that troubles me—" He paused and looked at Jodo who had turned his face to the wall. "When we put to sea it's going to be hard on the lad—terribly hard. I don't know much about medicine, but I do know moving him is the worst thing that could happen."

"What do you want to do? Leave me?" Jodo's voice came out muffled by the wall. When no immediate answer came, he added a hollow laugh. "Give you all more room in the boat, huh?"

"Don't be stupid, boy!" Shamus couldn't keep a sharp note out of his voice. "No one thought of leaving you."

"Of course we didn't, darling." In a lower voice she explained to the others, "Don't pay any attention—he doesn't know half what he's saying lately."

"You'd like to be sure of that, huh, sister? With what you got on *your* mind."

Jodo turned slowly and peered through half-shut eyes from one to the other, as if having difficulty distinguishing their separate identities. The left side of his upper lip curled in a con-



temptuous sneer.

"You cheap bastards," he grated, "you can fool yourselves, but not me. We're not out of here yet and I doubt if we ever will be—not all of us. You can't get everyone in the boat. If you do, it'll sink. So some of us have got to die. But you know damn well that chief said he would get us out of here if Cleo—ah, I'm wasting my breath. None of you have got the guts—the guts to come clean. Inside you're thinking the same thing I am—one woman against the rest of us, all of us. But forget it. Because you think you're going to escape you're getting brave."

He paused to empty his mouth of welling saliva. "Personally, I'd say if you reversed figures, nine dames for one man would be a better bargain. You know they wouldn't hurt her. They might lay her, that's all. And so what? What's that? Means nothing. But our lives do!"

The cold, biting venom of his words died away in the stillness of the little hut.

But the intense, dramatic quiet lasted only for a moment. A startling change had come over Shamus's usually composed features. He was standing rigid. All the blood had drained from his deeply tanned face, while the two small cheek muscles on either side of his stubble-bearded jaw worked in rapid unison. He stood stone still as he strove to gain control of himself. Once he started to speak but snapped his mouth shut.

"You unhealthy little rat!" When at last the words came, they were curt and biting but under complete control. "There's plenty of rottenness in all of us. But I imagine the devil himself took quite a while to become truly depraved, completely foul—like you. In my mind you are unique—'*Herba mala presto cresco*,' or near enough for you, 'When the worst comes to the worst, even bad becomes acceptable.' I'll waste no more breath on you."

Across the dank, dirt floor of the flimsy hut their eyes held, filled with the mutual, no longer disguised, hatred of congenital enemies. Only when Jodo's eyes finally wavered and his gaze shifted, did Shamus turn and walk silently from the hut.

For a long time Jodo lay in silence, staring at the ceiling, thinking. Finally he sucked in his breath in a satisfied punctuation to his decision. His plan was made now, and he felt secure and triumphant. He would put it into effect that night as soon

as the Kanaka left on guard went to sleep—as he was sure to do after an hour of lonesome watching. . . .

There came a distant rumble of thunder in the night. The giant mangrove crab, sliding along in the darkness across the clearing, halted suddenly and began waving his antennae warily as he picked up some warning vibration on the storm-laden air-waves of the still night air.

Jodo, crawling across the clearing, propelling himself forward by shoving his right shoulder slowly and painfully over the soft, soggy sand, felt his heart shoot upward like an elevator as he came face to face with the devilish apparition, standing nearly a foot off the ground; hairy, champing, foaming mouth—eyes, black and beady, on stilted prongs—one great claw upraised defensively, barely a couple of feet away from his face. There came a distant clap of thunder and a few heavy raindrops fell. The rains were setting in in earnest.

Jodo waited for his stomach to descend. His mouth felt dry, his tongue clove to the roof of his palate. Now only a few feet separated him from his objective, but long disuse of his battered limbs, the concentration required to crawl forward without using his left hip at all, called for every last ounce of will-power. Sweat poured down his face and he felt so weak he began to worry about the return journey—that 50 or 60 yards' crawl back to the hut might—

Co-ordination, he told himself—that was it. If he *thought* before making the least expenditure of energy, if he calculated every least movement first, economized, it could be done.

Concentrating on holding his left side rigid, he drew his right leg up under him, shoved his right shoulder along the ground and gained a foot of ground. Pausing to control his breathing after each propulsion, he repeated the painful maneuvers until at length he passed the longboat and finally reached the base of the tree stump.

Here he paused to summon strength and make sure all was quiet before making the final, supreme effort. Then, clasping the trunk with both arms, he edged himself upward, inch by inch, until he was in a position to reach up with his left hand.

The first attempt was a failure. The thing was still out of reach. He rested.

His next effort brought disaster—he had raised his body well off the ground and was reaching again when suddenly he lost his grip. His hands slid down the tree stump and with a low cry of pain he slumped to the ground. But he had the Eye tightly clutched in one hand. That was what mattered.

For safekeeping, and to allow him the use of both hands, he put it in his mouth for the crawl back. But his first movements brought a spasm of agony so sharp he spat the Eye out into his hand, barely choking back another cry.

Something had happened within him, something in his guts had given away, like the parting of a violin string. He could feel it now. A violent dizziness, a nausea, overcame him. He vomited.

As the boy lay retching the heavens reopened a sonorous barrage. Lightning flashed, forking across the sky, illuminating the inky blackness of the clearing. Rain, as if released in a solid body, poured down, and immediately upon absorption by the dank, jungle earth, there rose a heavy odor of decaying tropical verdure, sickly yet overpoweringly pungent.

Jodo lay in the clamorous uproar until his bowel-racking spasm eased, leaving him weak and shivering. Then slowly he began dragging his tortured body on its long journey back to the hut.

Once he fainted. And upon regaining consciousness he had no clear notion how long he had lain in the rain puddle. He dragged himself out and went on—on an interminable, pain-racked journey that only one of his peculiar brand of stoicism could have summoned the fortitude to continue. Each time he felt the overpowering urge to cry out for help, he clenched his teeth and choked the impulse back. Near the door of the hut lay the sleeping Kanaka who was supposed to be on watch. A single cry, Jodo knew, would render all of his effort useless.

At last he crawled exhausted onto his bed of leaves and lay there in dull misery. The spasms of vomiting brought excruciating agony, but in between them he felt little pain now.

From across the hut there came a little halfwaking whimpering sound. "My darling." Cleo's voice murmured with a faint note of fear and yearning in it. ". . . Oh, my darling."

Jodo turned his face to the wall and clamped his hand over his mouth to muffle the retching. *Idiot*, he thought savagely, *the conceited, selfish, egotistical idiot, in heat again. . . .* The all-

consuming deathly hurt in his intestines was sapping his strength fast. He grasped the Eye tightly in his hand. In a moment he would bury it in the earth floor. But just now it seemed too much effort. He could wait a bit.

Meanwhile an inward glow of triumph comforted him. Now, no matter what happened, he was protected. They could stay or shove off—the whole bunch of them. They could get killed or go to hell, he didn't give a damn. But no one would kill *him* now. The Eye, dumb though the whole stupid thing seemed, gave him control over his own, everyone else's destiny. So what, if they left him? So what—?

He fell into a kind of semiconscious stupor. A white, cloudless sky, like a vast shimmering screen, floated before his eyes. And against this background his father, the burlesque comedian, seemed to stand before him, wearing his voluminous sloppy trousers, tightfitting coat, and battered derby hat, looming hugely over his bed, twirling his drooping mustache, lugubrious and now grown to a fabulous size as wide as the horns of a wild steer. "I like to go swimmin', with bow-legged wimmin, and di-i-ive between their legs," he sang in his comical voice to the tune of the *Strawberry Blonde*. His jolly eyes rolled archly as he placed the palms of his hands together above his head on the word *dive*, as if about to plunge into the water.

Then the same man, his eyes small now and red with hate and evil, was tearing at Jodo's mother's throat, screaming animal-like filth. And a new figure appeared—a child, Jodo himself as he had been a few years before—to throw himself at the man in a futile frenzy, only to be brushed aside as easily as a fly. Soon he was shuddering at the final drunken obscenities that took place before his eyes.

Then the scene dissolved and part of his father lay beneath a streetcar, just his baggy trousers protruding, and a crowd gathered around, finished the last verse for him, while the shapeless trousers jerked convulsively up and down: "But gee what a duckin' I get when I'm—swimmin' with the wa-a-aves rushin' over me 'ead!"

The images on the shimmering screen changed. Suddenly, he was back in the floor show of the Paso Robles in Chicago. And how about that? There they were, all the same girls, but dressed

now in flimsy grass skirts. Now they sat in a circle, beating drums and swaying to the rhythm of a jungle dance.

Suddenly Anitok appeared in the wings, grown gigantic and wearing a leopard skin. One great leap took him across the stage to Jodo and his face loomed large and grotesque. Leering down he chanted, "We can make a deal, we can make a deal, we can make a DEAL—look!" and he produced half a dozen enormous blue eyes the size of turkeys' eggs. Without warning, he lunged out and gripped Jodo by the stomach, sinking his hands into the flesh, tearing and rending. . . .

For some reason Jodo was powerless to move or fight back. Although he ground his teeth and swore not to cry out, the pain in his vitals became so unbearable he began screaming.

Again the scene changed. Mr. Swartz appeared on the silver screen, carrying something in a basket. He cocked his round beaming face to one side and looked down at Jodo with the old kindly twinkle in his eyes. "What's wrong, fella?" he asked with kindly joviality. "It's Easter—see what I brought you? I know you like birds. . . ." And as he opened the basket the tiny yellow duckling inside immediately wobbled bravely to his feet, said "quack" conversationally a couple of times, and peered out at him with one little black eye, unafraid, complacent, curious.

In dim retrospect Jodo felt the tears that actually flooded his eyes. Again he savored the delicious thrill of ownership of a living thing. Again he felt, but no longer contemptuously, that inexplicable surge of tenderness that suffused him as he looked down at the tiny wobbling thing—the first gift anyone had ever given him. Old Dogface Swartz—

Slowly the hand that had been so tightly closed relaxed, and the Eye rolled noiselessly to the dirt floor of the hut.

In the gray light of early morning, thick, solid torrents of rain pelted down so hard even the heavy clouds of steam were no longer visible rising from the be-shrubbed roots of trees and the dank earth. A wind, mild at first, had sprung up from the north and was now beginning to clutch and claw at the frail thatch shelters.

The big mangrove crab, his business completed, but due to the stormy weather a bit confused about the time of day, hoisted aloft an antenna or two before beginning his sliding journey

back across the clearing.

Down the damp, ocher-colored incline beyond the river's edge, the longboat lay waiting, anchored in the shallow, red-mud water. Moored by a length of D'Alberti's vine to a solid hunk of stone, her mottled once-gray topsides deepladen in the water, a few inches of rain water swishing about her bilges with the eddy of the noon ebb, she swung her stern seaward with the tide.

Waiting, she rode bravely as a good boat will, bouncing cockily upon the swift current like an albatross upon an ocean swell.

### *Chapter Nineteen: ON THE WIDE, WIDE SEA*

FATHER KIRSHNER, dressed in white duck trousers, an enormous pith helmet and a white jacket buttoned Chinese style up to the neck, sprawled in hedonistic luxury in his new canvas deck-chair, smoking a pipe and contemplating the low-lying coast of dark New Guinea with a thoughtful eye. Blowing out a cloud of white smoke he scratched his full black beard with the stem of his pipe and listened with hearty satisfaction to the steady throb of the new eight-cylinder Diesel motor from America.

A truly wonderful machine, he conceded again, the epitome of reliability and shining beauty, the answer to a mechanic's prayer. So, he decided, before they arrived at the mouth of the Ramu, he must go down below to oil the pistons and grease the propeller shaft. He had done all this and more only a few hours ago, but such was the pleasure the smooth machinery and gleaming new engine room gave him that he felt the urge to do it all over again, to wipe off the fresh oil smudges with new cotton waste and then, before the waste was too saturated, give the bright chrome handles of the clutch and compressed-air wheel a few extra polishing wipes.

Father Kirshner had good reason to be ship-proud. For the *Mary Knoll*, named for an American missionary society and built by Catholic subscription in Sydney, was as fine a little craft, as graceful and well-found a South Seas schooner as ever stood before a breeze.

As he cocked a glance up forward at the two stout new canvas jibs drawing full in the artificial breeze created by her powered progress, at the staunch new shrouds, white-painted and tarred,

at the fresh-varnished bright work on hatches, belaying pins, and bulwarks, as he heard again the muffled boom of the splendid motor and felt her heel so tenderly in the light breeze, he heaved a sigh of gratitude. To think that the good people there in Sydney, busy with their own lives, occupied with a thousand cares of their own, should have time to give thought to the well-being of a few primitive Kanakas—living in dark isolation in a country at the world's end. . . .

As if this were not enough, only a month since he had been made Monsignor, as the ruby ring, now shining on his finger and sent him from Rome by the Holy Father himself, attested. The ecclesiastical advancement meant little, for he was far too truly humble a man, too genuine an altruist, to preen himself upon the reward of a lifetime's selfless work. But the *Mary Knoll*—that was another thing; she represented Time, a means of transportation. He could now penetrate distant areas in so many days which before, by sailing canoe or his own cutter, would have eaten up months, even years. This present trip to the Ramu River, for instance, would have been impossible in less than five or six times the time it had taken him.

He smiled again as he thought of the look of envy on the face of the squat little Japanese captain of the pearling lugger yesterday, the man he often ran into on his travels and who, far from being always industriously at work like most Japanese, always annoyed him by never seeming to do anything besides doze in his deck-chair, presumably day-dreaming.

"God damn! Fine ship, this one!" he had exclaimed in Pidgin, although Father Kirshner knew he spoke excellent German. (He had just been escorted on a proud tour of inspection.) "By 'm'bye me catch 'im ship all same this one," he had added with a peculiar grin. "You wait!"

Although the words sounded harmless enough, some hidden, ambiguous meaning irritated Father Kirshner. Japanese pearlers were becoming so numerous these days, it was wonderful how they all made a living.

"Ramu, ahoy!"

The cry came from aloft and the gargantuan cleric rose from his chair, the breeze whipping the thin ducks like tissue paper about the bulging muscles of his legs.

Forward he saw three long thin lines of breakers curling gently shoreward, disappearing into nothing round the buff of the low-lying point off the port bow. The smooth water over the bar made him exclaim aloud in gratification. "*Heiliger Gott*—what luck!" But immediately he corrected the phraseology to a muttered "The Lord is good. . . ."

Soon the *Mary Knoll* slid into the river. Soon she swung about and was in chains, near the very spot which Shamus had chosen for the last, ill-fated anchorage of the *Maski*. And as the anchor rattled to the muddy bottom in a small, unusually rocky cove, windlocked from the prevailing northerly, the beautiful new American motor coughed and sputtered and choked off into silence.

Immediately from the shore there came a screeching and a fluttering as a flock of startled parrots rose from the trees and fled. Otherwise, the silence was as deathly still as only the New Guinea jungle can be.

"Stand by, go ashore!" boomed Father Kirshner happily, with a broad, rather boyish grin splitting his tawny beard. He loved a strange shore.

He began telling off eight of his mission boys for a landing party, four bearing food and possibly useful gifts of calico, knives, tomahawks, and beads. Two to carry guns loaded with buckshot, two others with rifles. Theoretically, Father Kirshner might represent peace and goodwill on earth, but this benignity did not always include the untrod earth of his fellowman's shore-lines. Examining his revolver carefully, he stuck it in his belt and the shore expedition was ready.

Ashore, the landing looked silent and deserted, like virgin jungle, but as the ship's boat slipped through the light surf he became extra wary and alert.

"Guns ready!" he ordered. "Shoot high," he added, "unless commanded otherwise." He knew from experience that the actual moment of stepping ashore was always the most dangerous time—then, and walking up the open beach to the jungle's edge.

Both were accomplished without incident. Posting a guard over the boat, he led the way cautiously up the beach. Moving in single file, the party had only penetrated a short distance into the dense jungle when Father Kirshner, still at the head, suddenly



threw his hand up. The line of Kanakas halted, peering ahead. In a small open clearing there appeared to be a village.

Father Kirshner stood motionless. For several minutes he watched, silent, alert for the first movement. But no sound or sign of human life emanated from it. A cricket awoke and sent a few conversational chirps across the clearing; a frog croaked from the swamps. Otherwise all was still.

Stealthily, with infinite caution for such a big man, he moved slowly forward until he stood in the open.

His sharp eye instantly spotted some unusual features in the crude architecture of the thatched huts; all the uprights were propped together in a cone-shaped design—a type of construction unknown to Melanesians.

A quick glance inside one of the huts revealed an empty interior. "Gone!" he grunted. "But how? Have I come too late?" He began crossing the clearing.

Suddenly he halted again, his eye caught by a curious object that stood like a small monument in the center of the clearing.

The ochre-painted native figure was about four feet high, and Father Kirshner remarked with surprise that it was carved with considerable skill from the still rooted and growing stump of a tree.

The arms hung stiffly by its side, the legs ended in feet that merged with the living roots, while the grotesque features, sculptured into a ferocious snarl, had two small wild-boar tusks implanted one at each end of the wide mouth.

The idol, or whatever it was, possessed but one eye, in the center of the forehead: an eye pale blue, cold, and savage. A wonderful piece of native craftsmanship, thought Father Kirshner, as he stooped down to examine it.

He straightened up suddenly, hardly able to repress a slight shudder. Set in those wild features the eye, with the fine streaks of red running through it, gave the squat, disgusting little figure an uncannily lifelike appearance. Like the living incarnation of an ugly, diminutive Cyclops.

Inexplicably he was possessed of an overpowering impulse to destroy the thing—to tell one of the Kanakas to take an ax and hack it down. But he checked himself. Of how many stupidities, how often, must he remind himself when proselytizing among

the heathen; his system, when he was rational, consisted of curing their ills, teaching them to laugh easily and to learn the rules of football, before concerning himself with their souls. In his experience it was never long before the ancient idols and false images lost their importance.

On the side of the clearing several tracks led off into the jungle, to each side of which he found many small mounds of decayed native food—propitiatory offerings, apparently, to the little one-eyed idol.

Following the winding trail he soon found himself in another smaller clearing, a sort of little dell, where there grew a great D'Alberti's vine, hanging like an enormous scarlet tapestry over the face of a quarry—a wondrous sight indeed.

Here he stopped and stared down at the ground. In English lettering, roughly hewn on the crude wooden cross of one mound, was a brief legend: *DOC*. And on the other smaller one, four more letters: *JODO*.

"So the small one died too," he said. "Dumai thought that he would."

He made the sign of the cross, blessing the two graves, then hurried back to the beach. The pandanus-frond canopy still stood there, showing where the longboat had been, but of the boat itself there was no sign. Father Kirshner stepped over and examined the ground carefully. When he found the trail showing where the longboat had been dragged to the water's edge, his eye glowed with excitement and hope. He turned to his waiting crew.

"Back to the boat!" he shouted. "We're putting to sea at once." Then, as he saw the look of surprise on their faces, his own broke into a grin. "Amazing, isn't it?" he cried, and strode forward, his giant form leading the way so rapidly that his men had difficulty keeping up with him.

During all the rest of that day he pushed the *Mary Knoll* hard, cruising in a wide zigzag course over a large expanse of sea in the direction of the mission. By turns he would scan the horizon through his marvelous Zeiss glasses (though in his heart he knew that any one of his native crew could spot anything there with naked eyes before he, the aging one, could see it with the help of the glasses), and go below to oil, polish, and gloat over his

engine. But when dusk came, and still there had been nothing save the sea itself and the tree-fringed outlines of distant islands to reward their search, he ordered the ship into the shallow water off a small island, dropped anchor, and, after a frugal supper, went to his cabin where, in fifteen minutes, he was sound asleep.

In the morning, as soon as there was enough light to see a dozen yards away, before the sun was over the horizon, he ordered the anchor up and the boat under way. Then, once more, he took up his position in the bow, and, with his glasses began again to sweep the horizon. A sound at his elbow made him lower the glasses and look about. Vetoma, his bosun was standing a little stiffly beside him.

"I watch, Tabauda," the Kanaka said, shortly.

"Wonderful!" Father Kirshner beamed. "We'll watch together, eh? Four eyes are better than two, *nicht wahr?*"

Vetoma shrugged. "One good bugger best," he remarked placidly, and began to hum a native tune, repeating a single theme over and over monotonously. He was thinking that when the sight of two of the four eyes was dimmed, those eyes might as well rest while two better eyes were about. Father Kirshner could see the thought darting about in the keen eyes of the boy, and it annoyed him. Smug—the young lout! He'd spot the boat before any of them—if it was still afloat, that was.

Slowly the sun rose, casting its inexorable heat upon them, starting the sweat from every pore, driving the breath back into the lungs, searing the heart and brain. Over and over Vetoma hummed the monotonous refrain.

"Vetoma," Father Kirshner said, sharply. "Would you please—?" But suddenly he broke off in a grin. He had been about to tell the fellow to stop humming that inane tune, but he knew that he was really only expressing his own envious annoyance at the young Kanaka's keener vision. No fault of Vetoma's, surely. No sense taking out on him that dejection at the ravages of time. "Stone the bloody crows!" he grinned. "It beats all how many times one has to look for the same man in these islands. It was only a few months ago. Remember?"

Without shifting his gaze from the horizon, Vetoma raised his hand and swept it through the air in a sort of hopping

pattern.

"He jumped along the beach," he said stolidly. "Like a fish from my throw-net. Now perhaps he swims. Or jumps along another beach. Or perhaps he is dead." There was no change in his expression or modulation of his tone of voice as he said these things. It was as though whatever the situation, all was a matter of extreme boredom to him.

Father Kirshner lowered his glasses. "Do you ever feel anything, Vetoma?" he asked wonderingly.

The faintest vestige of a smile turned the corners of Vetoma's lips. "I eat, feel good. I sleep, feel good. I take woman, feel good. No sleep, no eat—" he paused longer than necessary "—no feel good. Altogether man, all same."

"So?" Father Kirshner looked at him, sharply. Then he muttered, with a trace of discouragement in his voice, "Ah, just children, pagans, all of them." Turning his back a little self-consciously, he directed his glasses in another direction. Suddenly he stiffened with excitement, and lowering his glasses, gave a swift look over his shoulder to see that Vetoma was still looking the other way. Then he wiped the lenses on his white duck trousers and quickly put the glasses to his eyes again. Then a bellow like that of a happy bull issued from his throat. "Look! A sail!" he cried. "A sail—if my good eyes do not deceive me—made of pandanus fronds! It is lowered, but it is still a sail!" He reached behind him and shook Vetoma's arm. "Look. Here, take these!"

But the Kanaka paid no attention to the glasses. For a moment, he looked fixedly in the direction in which Father Kirshner pointed, and then, speaking with his habitual lack of emotion, said. "It is so. The Tabauda's boat from the *Maski*, but with a sail of the pandanus. One hangs helpless on the side. No see other one."

With a great bound, Father Kirshner started aft.

"About ship!" he roared. "Vetoma, see that my medicine bag is ready. Bring out ice from the galley. They'll be overcome with heat, every one." That refrigerator! Next to the engine Father Kirshner was prouder of it than of anything else on the boat. "Here, give me that wheel," he cried, bounding into the tiny wheel house.

In a graceful arc the *Mary Knoll* swept about and headed at

full speed toward the boat with the pandanus-frond sail.

"Ah, I saw it first," Father Kirshner grinned happily to himself. Shaking his great head from side to side in joy, he let one hand drop from the wheel and slapped his rump. "Glory be to God, I saw it first!"

### *Chapter Twenty:* THE RIGHT TIME FOR IT

OVER Father Kirshner's mission rested the quiet peace of a Sunday evening. High above the blue Pacific hung a silver quarter moon, tinging the lapping waves of the sea and the thatched roofs of the village and fronds of the coconut trees on shore with faint light. It was all very much as it had been for years, yet there was a new air about it as of a sudden eagerness, a sudden excitement which came with a greater participation in the life of the world. Like all the best excitements it was made up of a number of things, for, through some strange law of chance (or is it chance?), especially significant events seldom take place singly. There was first of all the *Mary Knoll*, the fact of whose existence was still new and stimulating. Then there was the rescue of Shamus and his group, and the excitement of having them at the mission. And closely connected with all this were certain plans for the future—which Shamus, Whitey and Jim, and Father Kirshner had already talked over. Father Kirshner's eyes were perpetually alight these days. His movements had an increased vigor, his booming laugh a note of eager expectation like that of a young man about to set forth on his most exciting adventure.

Shamus lay stretched out under his favorite coconut tree a little down the beach from the mission—the tree under which he had lain so often during his former visit to the mission, when he had daily fought the raging battle which flamed in his soul between his desire for Ganice and his determination to do the thing which his conscience and Father Kirshner (rather synonymous in this case, those two) told him was the right thing to do—go his way and leave her life untouched, secure in the fulfillment which service through the Church had brought to her.

He felt a gentle tug at his heart now as he thought of it, and reviewed the events which had brought him back to this spot—

the conflict which had assailed him at Rabaul when the voyage to the Sepic with Doc Swartz had been proposed to him, the voyage which would make it possible for him to see Ganice again. He thought of how he had finally agreed to accept the charter—not because he wanted it, in fact for no reason except his intense desire to see her once more, to touch her hand, perhaps to take her in his arms—yes, he might as well confess it to himself, perhaps even to break down her loyalty to the Church and her vows out of his desire, in spite of all his high resolves.

How the thought of her had sustained him through those first difficult days of the voyage when everything had seemed at sixes and sevens on the *Maski*—Cleo's brash undisciplined lack of co-operation (or was it his lack of co-operation with her?), Jodo's troublemaking pettiness—he had turned from these into the refuge of his thoughts of Ganice, his desire for her, and in those moments his intellectual renunciation of her, and the celibacy which was to be, had seemed, in a sense, a fitting monument to her memory.

How quickly, how thoughtlessly, he had let his vow of celibacy be swept aside the night of the shore dinner when Cleo and he had lost themselves in a self-effacing moment of togetherness! The next day, in his pain and revulsion at what he had mistakenly believed to be evidence of shallowness in her, he had tried to convince himself that what he had done with Cleo had been merely to express his desire for Ganice. By proxy, he told himself, let's be frank.

Yet this conviction, too, had been lost in the dramatic events which had followed when, with the *Maski* utterly destroyed, the little party had faced death daily in the clearing near the mouth of the Ramu—when Cleo, with her calm bravery, her ever ready sense of humor, her strange admixture of toughness and tenderness, had been such a source of strength to him.

He had not thought it out then, had not realized fully what she had come to mean to him. He had gradually come to take her for granted—even that supreme gesture she had made during the last visit of the Pygmies, when she had unhesitatingly stepped forward to almost certain death in order to give them all one flickering chance at life.

Then there had been those three hellish days on the overloaded

longboat at sea, with the sun beating down mercilessly on them, broiling them alive, and the water lapping so close to the gunwales that the smallest unusual motion aboard sent it over the edge and made them start bailing again. Even Jodo—if he hadn't died that last night ashore—had they attempted to take him with them, even his extra bit of weight would have swamped the flimsy craft before they had been at sea two hours.

During these three interminable days when Shamus had been convinced that the sun and the sea and the weakness of starvation would do for them what the Pygmies had so nearly achieved, he had faced his own thoughts and feeling with that honest clarity life often gives to men along with the conviction that it is about to end.

He had been able to sift and analyze his love for Ganice and his love for Cleo, and recognize both as the truths that they were. He knew at last, lying there, weak and helpless across the thwarts of the boat, what he would do about them, if he could. And even though there was firmly within him the conviction that it was too late, that he would never again on earth have the opportunity to carry out any plan, he clung to the knowledge with his waning strength and consciousness, as one clings to the hope of life itself.

It was not until they had all been at the mission for three days, gradually regaining a measure of strength under the skillful administrations of Father Kirshner and his Kanakas that the priest had mentioned Ganice. She was not with them any more. For Sister Alicia, knowing that she had not much longer to live, had decided soon after Shamus had left them that she would go back to her home in Alsace to spend her few remaining days, and that Ganice would go with her, to care for her on the voyage and to receive a new assignment in troubled Europe, where the Church was fighting an increasingly necessary battle against a rising tide of organized atheism.

It was well, Shamus decided—just as well that they were not to see each other again. For in that final summing up which he had done in the longboat, he knew that Ganice had already fulfilled her place in his life, and that now she would remain forever the symbol of a bright perfection to him, all the loved intangibles of life compressed into a vision of beauty and purity—

but not to be touched, never to be known, not to be possessed.

He had told Cleo about her during the first night out in the longboat, by way of warning, perhaps, if they should reach the mission safely and be confronted together by the beauty of Ganice. He did not speak then of his love for Cleo, or of how the two loves had gradually straightened themselves out in his mind, for he wanted the sight of Ganice to make him very sure, wanted no cloud of doubt or hesitation to mar his ultimate declaration. And Cleo, making no comment, had held his hand very tightly in one of hers, and softly touched the back of it with the other, understanding, making him feel her understanding without words.

He stirred, and was about to get up to go and find Cleo, when he heard voices approaching down the beach through the gathering darkness: first the short monosyllabic utterances of Brother Arden, then the booming enthusiasm of Father Kirshner. So Brother Arden had arrived from the interior. He had been gone over a month, Father Kirshner had told him when they arrived, and was due back any day. Shamus, not feeling in the mood for talking with the dour brother for the moment, settled back and waited for them to pass. But instead of passing, the two men seated themselves not 20 feet away, not seeing him in the dark, while Father Kirshner went on talking.

"It's wonderful the way things work together," he boomed. "Even primitive political intrigue can sometimes work out for ultimate good. You remember, Brother Arden, the tall Kanaka named Tom—a henchman of Anitok—who came to us wounded a long time ago? An unscrupulous devil if there ever was one, as it turns out. Yet he saved the lives of all these people—all except the three Kanakas who tried to escape and who were killed by Anitok's men in the jungle. He has eliminated Anitok, is now himself the ruler of Anitok's Pygmies, and is ready and willing to co-operate with us. I think the truth of the matter is that he is afraid of the Arane people, but why question motives?"

"Anitok out of the way?" Brother Arden interposed. "High time. How did he do it?"

"No one save himself knows exactly," Father Kirshner answered. "The story Tom has spread among the natives is that Shamus shot the little tyrant after his men had deserted him on



the beach, but Whitey just now told me that no one in the party had any kind of a gun. What does it matter? Enough to know that the nuisance has gone to his maker to be judged. It saves us the trouble."

So that, Shamus was thinking, explained that single shot which they had heard just after the Pygmies had left them the last time. Merely a political assassination, the removal of one ruler by another who chose to take his position, an event for which precedent abounded in the savage political customs of both Melanesia and Western Europe. It must have been easy for Tom, with the Pygmies fleeing ahead in the jungle, too terrified by the Eye to look back, to put a bullet through Anitok's brain and later say that it had come from the beach, for already he could have built up the belief that the white people had hidden weapons.

"All we know certainly," Father Kirshner went on, "is that Tom, when he learned who the white people on the beach were, sent a captured Kanaka slave Dumai, one of Shamus's old crew, to me to tell of the plight of the white people so that I could rescue them. It was his return for our curing him—or, if you like, a part of his political plan for gaining future co-operation from Shamus and from us. And, would you believe it? Dumai, as it turns out, is the brother of Shamus's bo'sun, Tulare. They are as happy in their reunion as two children, and both of them devoted to Shamus and the mission."

Suddenly the whole mixed picture straightened itself out in Shamus's understanding as the machinations of a primitive mind were revealed to him by Father Kirshner's story. Kanaka Tom had always planned eventually to depose Anitok and make himself the ruler of the tribes. For years he must have dreamed of it, schemed for it, waiting his moment. Also he was shrewd enough to know that he could go farther with the support and friendship of Father Kirshner and his friends than without it. It is possible he even felt a certain loyalty to the priest, too, because of the help which had been given him in the past—a loyalty which he could afford to express so long as it furthered his own aims. Yet he dared not befriend the castaways on the beach in open opposition to Anitok, for fear of appearing a coward and a traitor in the eyes of the men. So he had sent Dumai—perhaps

secretly—to stir the mission to action (for he would never be blamed for a rescue by the white man of the priestly magic). Meanwhile Tom stood by in order to prevent an attack if Anitok became impatient. The sudden and unexpected appearance of the Eye must have been welcomed by him, for not only did it make it unnecessary for Tom to prevent the attack, but, through driving the Pygmies away from their leader, it gave him the moment which he needed to fire the single shot which achieved his own ambition, under circumstances which made it possible to place the blame on Shamus and his group. What would Tom do with his power now that he had it, Shamus wondered.

But he was missing something else that Father Kirshner was saying.

"I saw it first, Brother Arden. I want you to remember that whatever Vetoma may be saying. These old eyes! Amazing, isn't it?" The big voice boomed on. "At first I took it to be a sampan—so many Japanese have been coming around lately. She was becalmed, lying on the glassy water so still that she might have been deserted. They had dropped the square front-matted sail to shield them from the sun, which was beating down like fire; *Mary Knoll's* decks were so hot it was even burning the soles of the crew's feet, and when a Kanaka jumps around like a cat on hot bricks you know how it must have been on the small boat.

"They were all emaciated and had suffered terribly from the heat. We had a lot of trouble getting them on board. None of them could stand, not even Shamus, and you know how strong he is. I was amazed any of them were alive. Even when we got them back to the mission, the one they call Whitey nearly died, poor fellow. He had such a light complexion and the entire upper part of his body was broiled raw red, literally covered by a blotched mass of huge water blisters, some of which had broken and festered.

"I kept him wrapped in coconut-oil dressings day and night, and—stone the pelicans!—in less than a week not only he but the whole bunch of them were on their feet and well again! Wonderful! They've been here two weeks now, and they're all as chipper as monkeys and eager for the future."

"Humph!" Shamus could sense the look of cynical disap-

proval on Brother Arden's face as he grunted his question. "What future is there for them?"

"You'll be surprised, my friend. It's amazing how all things work together! Shamus and Whitey and Jim—I call them all by their familiar names now, that's the way they are—have talked it all over with me. They were engaged on certain important work for their governments when their ship was wrecked. It seems that their governments expect some sort of trouble with the Japanese out here and are getting information to prepare for it. Shamus, who was all at sixes and sevens about his life when he left here before, finds his own problems settled by this need. He has joined the other two to carry on the work. They are chartering the *Mary Knoll* to go back to Rabaul, get equipment and a ship, and then come back. Kanaka Tom has offered his support and protection throughout the whole Ramu River district. They will set up headquarters in the district and help us to establish the mission there we have wanted so long. Isn't it amazing?"

"And the woman?" Brother Arden's voice showed that he was skeptical of anything good coming out of a situation that involved any woman save perhaps those who had taken the vows of the Church.

Father Kirshner laughed, but now the booming resonance of his voice was suppressed by a certain tenderness and awe. "Isn't she beautiful?" he asked softly. "I confess to you, Brother Arden, though I would not want you to repeat this, that she made me remember certain worldly desires of my youth. She has talked to me. . . . But I must respect her confidence. What she will do—well, that depends, I suspect. She's a fine woman, and she, too, has found a meaning in life, which was very empty before she met Shamus."

For a moment he was silent, and as he spoke again it was almost as though he were speaking to himself. "What did Goethe say? 'If there but lived a man who could understand the wondrous wealth of constant fond devotion a woman's heart can hold for him whom she loves truly. . . .' I'm afraid I've translated it badly."

There was a moment of silence, then Shamus saw Father Kirshner stand, a looming shadow in the night.

"I must be off, Brother Arden. I'm in the middle of a new detective story from America. It seems this fellow Dick Tracy, whom I've told you about, suspects the establishment of a vast conspiracy to—well, I mustn't spoil it for you. I'll lend it to you when I've finished."

Shamus waited until their voices were lost in the night, as the two went back toward the mission, then slowly rose and followed them. But as he entered the village street the night held him with its magic. Why go inside while the moon rode high, and the sweet damp perfume of the jungle bathed his senses?

He turned, and walked slowly down to the dock where the *Maski* had been tied during his earlier visit. The *Mary Knoll* was there now, riding quietly with the almost imperceptible movement of the gentle swell. Reaching out, Shamus could rub his hand along her smooth, smartly painted side.

"Hello!" Cleo's voice, low and vibrant, came from so close that it startled him. It was as though the *Mary Knoll* herself had spoken to him.

He looked up and could barely distinguish her on the deck of the boat. She was leaning forward, her elbows on the rail, and even in the dim light from the half moon he could see her gentle smile, and the way the quaint, old-fashioned white Mother Hubbard which Father Kirshner had found in the mission stores for her lent a certain Old World grace to her figure. Shamus remembered the first time he had seen her after they reached the mission—barefooted, and in a peasant skirt and high-necked blouse, out of a stock of clothing sent to the mission for distribution to worthy natives. He had been amazed then to see how naturally and beautifully she wore them. In any time, in any place, in any sort of costume, Cleo would be Cleo, he realized, the embodiment of a very specialized grace.

"Sort of came back to the scene of the crime, I guess," she laughed. "It's been on my mind, this boat, because—well, you know, funny thing—but in a way this was the worst of it."

"Oh?" Shamus's monosyllabic question was merely an expression of the need to respond, rather than anything which had meaning in itself. Some persons, under the stress of emotion, cover their feelings with an excess of speech. Shamus, when he felt anything with especial intensity, retreated into monosylla-

bism or complete silence. Afraid that he might have given an impression of disinterestedness, he went on, "I would have thought that you were unconscious during most of the trip back, but I was so near it myself that my memory isn't very reliable. Close, eh?"

"Close enough," Cleo agreed, "but not so squeaky as I would have imagined. Here, give me a hand down." As easily as a small boy, she stepped over the rail, and, swinging out, holding to the rail with one hand, extended the other to Shamus, then, as he took it, lightly jumped the two feet of space to the dock and stood beside him.

But she didn't let go of his hand. Slowly they walked to the end of the dock and sat down, dangling their feet toward the water.

"You see," Cleo went on, "I decided there in the longboat, as I felt myself passing out, that we probably were finished—that hunger and thirst and the sun, and the sea which could have swamped us with a wave as big as your hand, was going to do what we had feared the Pygmies would do. It sounds morbid and cowardly when I say it now, but it wasn't that way at all, because I found that there was nothing unnatural about it, and that I didn't mind—too much. It was sort of a 'when your time comes' feeling and, you know, Shamus, a thing done in the proper time always seems all right, somehow. Some old guy once—I never can get quotations straight, so I don't know who he was—said something about there's a time to love and a time to hate, a time to throw stones at people and a time to pick them up, a time to make love and a time to keep hands off, a time to live, and a time to die—well, that's what I mean. He had something there, whoever he was. And I guess I figured on the longboat that I'd had my time to—well, to play at love first and then to really love—my time to live—and now it was that other time, and it seemed all right. And when the *Mary Knoll* picked us up, I was just enough in the know to realize that I'd have to start all over again—and to think that maybe I was outliving my time. And it didn't seem such a hot idea that day. I'd never want to do that, you know, never want to half live, having once seen what it is to live fully. I'd rather get it quick from the top of a wave like the one that threw us on shore from the *Maski* than to

be drowned slowly in pond water, if you know what I mean."

Shamus didn't answer in words, but the pressure of his hand told her that he did understand and that he felt the same way about it. For a moment neither said anything, held in a silence which seemed more intimate than any words could have been.

Through his mind there was running the music of those beautiful words from *Ecclesiastes* which Cleo had tried to quote:

*To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born; and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace; and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war and a time of peace.*

For Doc and Jodo, for Anitok and the three rash Kanakas who had sought to escape to life, it had been a time to die. But for Cleo and him—

"Perhaps," he said, "the same sort of thing happened to both of us, but we took it in different ways. I thought we were finished, there in the longboat, too. And now that it's over I don't mind telling you that I thought we would be killed in the clearing. Sometimes I think it was only your belief that we would somehow get out of it which did the trick. That sounds—well, mystical, I suppose—but things like that matter a lot. For one thing, I'm sure it was only the knowledge that you believed in me which kept me from showing how scared I was. And I have an idea that if they had known that, they would have finished us off on their first visit. But when Father Kirshner picked us up, and we were all on the *Mary Knoll*, I knew we were saved, and I was very happy. I felt as though one life had ended, and another was about to begin—a very fine one which would make the one that had passed just sort of, well, preparation for the new one."

"Maybe that was because you knew what you wanted and were sure that you could get it. Men sometimes can be sure. But if a

girl, for instance, was sure of what she wanted, but couldn't be sure that she could have it—it'd be different, wouldn't it?" A very small girl, pleading for something which she was afraid she wouldn't get, but which she wanted very much, asked the question.

"I suppose it would." Shamus's voice was precisely British, formal courteous speech suddenly coming to his lips from old habit, as a cloak to the surge of emotion which arose in him. But suddenly his desire and his need swept away all else, and he was holding Cleo's hand tightly in both of his own, while his head dropped to her breast. Now it was he who seemed the small child, clinging to the woman, asking for assurance. He could feel the softness of her breasts against his cheek, and beneath them hear the loud strong beating of her heart in rhythm with the tumult of his own, giving him the answer that he needed.

"It *is* true, isn't it?" he whispered. "I can be sure, can't I?" Then his arms went swiftly and hungrily about her, and he was kissing her, at first gently, then greedily, their lips meeting with the passion which they had shared that night so long ago after the shore dinner, but with an added strength and firmness which is the gift of tested love. He had formed the words he was about to say. He had planned them swiftly and carefully, to tell her that she was quite right, that he had known what he wanted, though he had not been as sure that he could have it as she had thought he might be—that he wanted her, nothing more, nothing less, for the whole of the new life that had been given him. But now no words would come, no words seemed necessary, as his hand, seeking, found her flesh and his pent-up desire rose to overwhelm him, while her body, yielding, yearning to him, answered him adequately enough.

"All that I want—all that I want forever," she breathed, and her lips found the hollow of his neck and kissed him with a succession of little tendernesses which were more voluble than passion. "Oh, Shamus—Shamus, my darling!"

Suddenly he drew back as a question presented itself to him. "I wonder if Kirshner would marry us?" he asked. "We're neither of us of his Church, and I'm not sure that they're allowed to."

"He will," Cleo said, with a strange positiveness.

"How can you be sure?" Shamus asked.

Cleo snickered. "I didn't ask him if he would. I told him he *had* to. I told him you hadn't asked me yet, but you were going to."

"Oh," said Shamus.

"I told him he was talking to a girl who couldn't afford to dilly-dally, if he knew what I meant."

Shamus started. "So it's what you thought? It's—"

"Sure. I'm pregnant," Cleo said matter-of-factly. "Just as I hoped—just as I wanted to be. And, thank God, by the right man! I never would have told you—I would even have lied to you about it if necessary—if you hadn't wanted me. I told Father Kirshner and made him promise not to say anything. I couldn't have borne the thought that perhaps you had asked me to marry you because of that. I wanted you to want me, you see. You do, don't you? No, don't answer that—I know you do."

Shamus grinned in the darkness.

She drew her hand from his and reached into the pocket of her skirt. "I've got something for you, darling," she said. "Call it an early wedding present if you like. It's the thing I picked up that day on the beach—remember? I've been carrying it about with me ever since we got here, waiting for the proper time to give it to you. This is it. I think you'll want to keep it always. I'm not sure that I'd be able to understand you if you didn't."

She slipped it quietly into his hand, a small, paper-wrapped package, and Shamus questioningly unwrapped it, feeling along the rough edges of what seemed a bit of broken pottery about twice the size of a silver dollar. Taking a match from his pocket, he struck it and held it above the object in his hand.

It was a piece of the Dresden china vase.



## *From the harbors of Salem to the barems of Tartary*

JASON STARBUCK sought a girl whom he called the Golden Fleece—the proud, bold, beautiful Roxana.

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